



JACQUES DAMOUR.

EMILE ZOLA

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MADAME NEIGEON — NANTAS
HOW WE DIE — THE COQUEVILLE SPREE
THE ATTACK ON THE MILL

ENGLISHED BY

WILLIAM FOSTER APTHORP

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TO

OCTAVIE LOIR IASIGI APTHORP

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I

OVER yonder at Nouméa, when Jacques Damour looked out upon the sea's void horizon, he sometimes thought he could see his whole story there: the wretchedness of the siege, the wrath of the Commune, then that wrench which had cast him so far away, sore, and as if felled to earth. It was no distinct vision of memories that he could recall with gladness and a heart swelling with affection; but rather the dull rumination of a darkened mind, returning of its own accord to certain facts which still stood erect and clean-cut amid the crumbling downfall of the rest.

At twenty-six, Jacques married Félicie, a big, handsome girl of eighteen, niece of a fruit dealer at la Villette, who let him a room. He was a chaser in metals and earned upwards of ten francs a day; she was a seamstress at first, but they soon had a little boy, and the housekeeping and taking care of the child were all she could attend to. Eugène grew lustily.

Nine years later, a girl came in her turn, and she, Louise, was, for a long time, so sickly that they spent a great deal on medicines and drugs. Still the household was not badly off. Damour, to be sure, would have a wet Monday now and then, but he would listen to reason, go to bed if he had drunk more than was good for him, and back to work next day, calling himself a good-for-nothing. When twelve years old, Eugène was put to the chaser's vice. The boy could hardly read and write when he began to earn his living. Félicie was very tidy and kept house like a clever and prudent woman; a little "nigh" perhaps, the father would say, for she gave them vegetables oftener than meat, so as to lay by a few sous against a rainy day. This was their best time. They lived at Ménilmontant in the rue des Envierges, in a set of three rooms, — the father's and mother's bedroom, Eugène's, and a dining-room where the workbenches were set up, without counting the kitchen and a small closet for Louise. It was at the back of a courtyard in a small building; but they had air, notwithstanding, for their windows opened upon an old, disused lumber yard, where carts came from morning till evening to dump heaps of rubbish and old boards.

When the war broke out, the Damours had been living in the rue des Envierges for ten years. Félicie, though nearing forty, retained her youthfulness, if a little stouter than she once was, with a roundness of shoulder and hip that made her the fine woman of the neighborhood. On the other hand, Jacques had rather dried up, and the eight years between them already made him look old beside her. Louise was out of danger, but still delicate, and took after her father in her girlish spareness, whereas Eugène, then nineteen, had his mother's inches and broad back. They were a very united family, excepting some Mondays when father and son would dawdle on at the wine shop. Félicie would then sulk, in a rage over the sous wasted. Twice or three times they even came to blows, but it did not amount to anything; it was the fault of the wine, and there was not a better behaved family in the house. They were quoted for the example they set. When the Prussians marched on Paris, and the terrible time of slack work began, they had over a thousand francs laid up in the Savings Bank. It was doing well for working people who had brought up two children.

So the first months of the siege were not very hard. In the dining-room, where the

workbenches stood idle, there was still white bread and meat to eat. Taking pity on the distress of a neighbor, a big devil of a house painter by the name of Berru, who was starving, Damour could even afford to ask him to dinner from time to time, for charity's sake, and soon the comrade came morning and evening. He was a funny dog, amusing in his talk, so much so that he succeeded at last in disarming Félicie, who was worried and disgusted at first at that wide mouth gobbling up all the best bits. In the evening they would play cards while abusing the Prussians. Berru, who was a patriot, talked of digging mines and underground passages into the country, and of so getting under their batteries at Châtillon and Montretout, and blowing them up. Then he would fall tooth and nail upon the government, a set of cowards who, to bring back Henri V, wanted to throw open the gates of Paris to Bismarck. The republic those traitors wanted made him shrug his shoulders. Ah! the republic! And with both elbows on the table, his short pipe in his mouth, he would explain to Damour what his idea of a government was; all people brothers, all free, riches for everybody, a reign of justice and equality everywhere, above and below.

—— "Like in '93," he added, in his up-and-down way, knowing nothing about it.

Damour looked grave. He, too, was a republican, because, from his cradle up, he had heard people round him say that the republic would be the workingman's triumph, and bring universal happiness. But he had no distinct notion of how all this was to be brought about. So he listened attentively to Berru, thinking he reasoned very well, and that for sure the republic would come as he said. He grew hotter; he believed that if all Paris, men, women, and children, had marched on Versailles singing the *Marseillaise*, the Prussians would have been bowled over, a hand stretched out to the provinces, and a government of the people founded, — the one that was to give every citizen an income.

—— "Take care," Félicie said over and over again, full of distrust, "it will turn out wrong with that Berru of yours. Feed him as long as you please, but let him go and get his head broken by himself."

She, too, wanted the republic. In '48 her father had been killed at a barricade. Only this recollection, instead of turning her head, made her rational. In the people's place, she said she knew how she would force the go-

vernment to be just; she would behave well herself. Berru's philippics made her indignant and frightened her, because she did not think them proper. She saw that Damour was changing, adopting ways and using language that pleased her but little; but she was made more anxious still by the excited and gloomy way Eugène would listen to Berru. In the evenings, when Louise had fallen asleep with her head on the table, Eugène would fold his arms and sip at a small glass of brandy without speaking, with his eyes fixed upon the painter, who always brought back some extraordinary story of treachery from Paris, either about Bonapartists making signals to the Germans from Montmartre, or else sacks of flour and kegs of powder being sunk in the Seine, the sooner to surrender the city.

—— "There are stories for you!" Félicie would say to her son when Berru had made up his mind to go. "Don't you get by the head, now! You know he's lying."

—— "I know what I know," Eugène would answer, with a terrific flourish of his arm.

By near the middle of December the Damours had run through all their savings. Every hour there would come some report of a Prussian defeat in the provinces, of a victori-

ous sally that was to deliver Paris; and the household was not frightened at first, in constant hope that work would begin again. Félicie did wonders; they lived from day to day on the black siege bread, which only little Louise could not digest. Then Damour and Eugène got completely by the head, as the mother had said. Idle from morning till night, fallen out of their old habits and their arms lazy ever since they had quit the workbench, they lived in constant anxiety, in a state of terror full of fantastic and bloody imaginings. Both had joined a marching battalion; only this battalion, like many another, did not even get outside the fortifications, but stayed quartered in barracks where the men passed their days in playing cards. And it was there that Damour, with empty stomach and his heart sore with knowing there was want at home, became convinced, by listening to the scraps of news that were brought in from time to time, that the government had sworn to exterminate the people so as to be masters of the republic. Berru was right; no one was ignorant that Henri V was at Saint-Germain, in a house over which floated the white flag. But all this should end. One of these fine mornings they would let fly at those rapscallions who starved

the workingmen and let them be bombarded, just to make room for the nobles and priests. Whenever Damour came home with Eugène, both of them in a fever, caught from the madness that reigned outside, they did not talk of killing people before Félicie, who, all pale and mute, sat nursing little Louise; the child had fallen sick again from the bad food.

Meanwhile the siege was over, the armistice was concluded, and the Prussians marched down the Champs-Elysées. In the rue des Envierges they ate white bread, which Félicie had been to Saint-Denis to get; but it was a gloomy dinner. Eugène, who had been to see the Prussians, was telling about their entry into the city, when Damour, brandishing his fork, cried out furiously that all the generals ought to have been guillotined. The next few days, as there was still no work to be had, he made up his mind to go back to his workbench again on his own account; he had some castings of candelabra which he would finish, in the hope of selling them. Eugène could not keep still, and threw up the job after an hour. As for Berru, he had disappeared ever since the armistice; no doubt he had found a better table. But he came back one morning, very much set up with liquor, and told them of the

affair with the Montmartre cannon. Barricades were going up everywhere, the people's triumph was coming at last; and he had come for Damour, saying that all good citizens were needed. Damour left his workbench, in spite of Félicie's troubled face. It was the Commune.

The days of March, April, and May came and went. When Damour was tired and his wife implored him to stay at home, he would answer,—

——"And my thirty sous? Who will give us bread?"

Félicie bowed her head. All they had to buy food was the father's thirty sous and the son's thirty sous, the pay of a national guard, which was sometimes supplemented with rations of wine and salt meat. For the rest, Damour was convinced he was in the right; he fired upon the Versaillese as he would have fired upon the Prussians, fully persuaded that he was saving the republic and assuring the people's happiness. After the weariness and wretchedness of the siege these repeated shocks of civil war made his life one nightmare of tyranny, in which he fought as an obscure hero, determined to die in the defence of liberty. He did not go into the complicated theoretical

details of the communistic principle. In his eyes the Commune was but a heralding of the golden age, the beginning of universal felicity; and he believed with still more obstinacy that there was somewhere, at Saint-Germain or Versailles, a king ready to re-establish the Inquisition and the rights of seigneurs, if he were allowed to enter Paris. At home he would not have crushed an insect; but at the outposts he picked off gendarmes without a scruple. When he came home, black with sweat and powder, he would stay for hours by little Louise's side, listening to her breathing. Félicie did not try to hold him back; like a prudent woman she calmly awaited the end of all this upheaval.

Still she called his attention one day to the fact that that big devil of a Berru, who did so much shouting, was not fool enough to go and get caught by a bullet. He had been clever enough to get a good place in the commissariat; but this did not prevent him, when he came in his uniform with plumes and frogging galore, from egging on Damour with his palaver and his schemes of fusillading the ministry, the Chambre, and the whole shebang, on the day when they should go and catch them at Versailles.

——"Why doesn't he go himself, instead of driving others to it?" said Félicie.

But Damour replied,—

——"Shut up! I do my duty. All the worse for those who don't do theirs!"

One morning toward the end of April, Eugène was brought home on a stretcher to the house in the rue des Envierges. He had received a bullet full in the breast at les Moulineaux. While they were carrying him up, he died on the stairs. When Damour came home that evening he found Félicie speechless beside their son's dead body. It was a terrible blow; he fell upon the floor, and she let him sob on while she sat leaning against the wall. She said nothing because she could think of nothing to say, and, if she had let slip a word, she would have cried out, "It's your fault!" She shut the closet door and made no noise, for fear of frightening Louise. She even went to see if the father's sobs did not wake the child. When he got up from the floor he went to the looking-glass and looked long at a photograph of Eugène, in which the young man was taken in his national guard's uniform. He took a pen and wrote on the back of the card, "I will avenge you," with the date and his signature. It was a relief. Next day a hearse

draped in large red flags bore the body to Père-Lachaise, followed by an immense crowd. The father walked bareheaded; the sight of those flags, of that bloody red that made the black woodwork of the hearse seem to turn still darker, swelled his heart with savage thoughts. Félicie stayed behind with Louise in the rue des Envierges. That very evening Damour went back to the outposts to kill gendarmes.

At last came the days of May. The Versailles army was in Paris. He did not come home for two days, but retreated with his battalion, defending the barricades in the midst of conflagrations. He no longer knew what he was doing, but fired into the smoke because such was his duty. On the morning of the third day he reappeared in the rue des Envierges, in rags, staggering and stupefied like a drunken man. Félicie undressed him and was washing his hands on a wet towel, when a neighbor's wife told them that the communists were still holding their own in Père-Lachaise, and the Versaillese could find no way to dislodge them.

——"I'm going there," he said simply.

He dressed again and took his musket. But the last defenders of the Commune were not

on the plateau, on the cleared ground where Eugène slept. He had had a confused hope of getting killed over his son's grave. He could not even make his way thither. Shells began to come, knocking off corners from the great tombstones. Among the elms, hidden behind the marble slabs that stood bleaching in the sun, were a few national guards, still firing upon the soldiers, whose red trousers were seen coming up the slope. Damour arrived just in time to be taken prisoner. Thirty-seven of his companions were fusilladed. It was a wonder that he escaped this summary justice. As his wife had washed his hands and he had not fired a shot, they perhaps meant to show him mercy. For the rest, in the stupor of his fatigue, stunned by so many horrors, he never remembered the days that followed. All was a confused nightmare in his consciousness: long hours spent in dark places, exhausting marches through the sun, shrieks, blows, passing through gaping crowds. When he came out of this imbecile condition he was at Versailles, a prisoner.

Félicie came to see him; she was still pale and calm. When she told him that Louise was better, they were both mute, finding nothing more to say. On going away she tried to encourage him by telling him that his case was

being attended to and that they would get him off. He asked,—

—"And Berru?"

—"Oh!" she replied, "Berru is all safe. . . . He decamped three days before the entry of the troops; they won't trouble him."

A month later Damour started for New Caledonia. As he did not have a commission, the court-martial might perhaps have acquitted him, had he not quietly confessed to having been firing from the first day. At their last meeting he said to Félicie,—

—"Wait for me with the little one."

And it was this speech that Damour heard most distinctly amid the confusion of his memories when he sat, heavy-headed and plunged in thought, over against the sea's void horizon. Sometimes darkening night would overtake him there. In the distance there long remained a streak of light, like the wake of a ship, piercing through the growing darkness; and it would seem as if he must arise and walk over the waves, to sally forth on that white path, since he had promised to return.

II

At Nouméa, Damour behaved well. He found work, and they gave him hopes of his pardon. He was a very sweet-tempered man, fond of playing with little children. He did not busy himself with politics, and was little in the society of his fellow-convicts, but lived alone; all the fault that could be found with him was that he would drink now and then, but even then he was good-natured in his cups, weeping consumedly, and going to bed of his own accord. So his pardon seemed assured, when one day he disappeared. They were thunderstruck to hear that he had escaped, together with four of his companions. In two years he had got several letters from Félicie, regularly at first, but soon less frequently and only at odd intervals. He, himself, wrote pretty often. Three months went by without news from her. Then he fell into a fit of despair at the thought of that pardon for which he might, perhaps, have to wait two years more, so he risked all in one of those fevered

moments which a man repents of next day. A week later a wrecked boat was found on the shore, some five miles away, with the bodies of three of the fugitives, naked and already decomposed; witnesses deposed that they recognized Damour among them. It was his stature and his beard. After a summary inquest, the regular formalities were gone through with; a certificate of decease was drawn up and then forwarded to France at his widow's request; she had been notified by the administration. The entire press rang with this adventure; a highly dramatic account of the escape and its tragical catastrophe got into the papers in every country.

Yet Damour was alive. One of his companions had been mistaken for him, and this in all the more surprising a way that the two men did not look alike. Only both wore their beard long. Damour and the fourth escaped convict, who had survived as by a miracle, parted company as soon as they got upon English soil; they never saw each other again. No doubt the other died of yellow fever, which all but carried off Damour himself. His first thought was to send Félicie word by letter; but a newspaper fell into his hands, and he found in it the account of his escape and

death. From that moment he thought a letter would be imprudent; it might be intercepted, read, and the truth thus known. Would it not be better to stay dead to every one? Nobody would trouble himself about him; he would be free to return to France, where he would wait for the amnesty before making himself known. And it was then that a terrible attack of yellow fever kept him for weeks in an out-of-the-way hospital. When Damour's convalescence set in, an invincible laziness came over him. For several months he was very weak and without force of will. The fever seemed to have emptied him of all his old desires. He had no longings and asked himself, "What's the use?" The images of Félicie and Louise were wiped out. He still saw them, to be sure, but very far off, as in a fog; at times he would have difficulty in recognizing them. No doubt he would go back to them as soon as he was strong; but when at last he was on his feet again, another plan took complete possession of him. Before going back to his wife and daughter he would first make his fortune. What would there be for him to do in Paris? He would starve; he would have to take to his workbench once more, and perhaps he could not even get work, for he felt terribly aged.

On the other hand, if he went to America he could make some hundred thousand francs in a few months, — a modest figure at which he stopped, with prodigious stories of millions buzzing in his ears. In a gold mine they told him of, every man, down to the humblest laborer, rode in his own carriage by the end of six months. And he forthwith began to plan out his life: he would return to France with his hundred thousand francs, buy a little house out Vincennes way, and live there on three or four thousand francs a year with Félicie and Louise, forgotten, happy, and with no more politics to bother him. A month later Damour was in America.

Then began a restless life that threw him, as chance would have it, into a sea of adventures, at once strange and commonplace. He made acquaintance with every sort of indigence, with every sort of fortune. Three times he thought he had his hundred thousand francs, but it all slipped through his fingers; he was swindled, and ruined himself in a final effort. Upon the whole, he suffered a good deal, worked much, and came out of it without a shirt to his back. After expeditions to the four points of the compass, the course of events left him stranded in England. Thence he got to Brussels, on the

very boundary of France; but he had lost all thought of crossing the frontier. On his arrival from America he wrote to Félicie. As he got no answer to three letters, he was reduced to these suppositions: either his letters had been intercepted, or his wife was dead, or else she herself had left Paris. A year later he made another futile attempt. Not to give himself away, he had written under an assumed name, telling Félicie of some imaginary business, counting upon her surely recognizing his handwriting and understanding what he meant. This dead silence, so to speak, lulled his memory to sleep. He was dead, he had no one in the world to call his own, nothing mattered to him any more. For nearly a year he worked in a coal mine underground, out of sight of the sun, utterly wiped out of existence, without a further desire.

One evening in a tavern he heard a man say that the amnesty had been voted, and all the communists were returning. This waked him. It gave him a shock; he felt that he must leave Belgium with the rest and once more see the street where he used to live. At first it was a purely instinctive impulse. Then, in the train back to Paris, he thought of his now being able to reclaim his place in the sunlight, if he should

succeed in finding Félicie and Louise. Hope sprang up afresh in his heart; he was free, he would look for them openly; he at last persuaded himself that he would find them living very quietly in their lodgings in the rue des Envierges, with the cloth laid, as if they expected him. All would be explained, some quite simple misunderstanding. He would go to the mairie, give his name, and the household would once more begin its life of long ago.

In Paris the gare du Nord was thronged with a tumultuous crowd. The air was filled with acclamations as soon as the travellers appeared: a mad enthusiasm, arms waving in the air, open mouths howling out a name. Damour was frightened for a moment; he did not understand; he fancied that all those people had come to hoot at him as he passed by. Then he recognized the name they were shouting, that of a member of the Commune who happened to be on his train, an illustrious rebel to whom the people were giving an ovation. Damour saw him go by, much stouter than he used to be, moist-eyed, smiling, touched with his reception. When the hero got into a fiacre the crowd talked of unharnessing the horse. People were crushed, the human wave was en-

gulfed in the rue Lafayette, a sea of heads, above which you could long see the fiacre driving slowly on like a triumphal car; and Damour, in all this crush and jostling, had much difficulty in getting to the exterior boulevards. All his sufferings, Versailles, the ocean voyage, Nouméa, came back to him in a hiccough of bitterness.

But on the exterior boulevards he was seized with a fit of soft-heartedness. He forgot all, it seemed as though he had just taken some work home up-town, and were quietly returning to the rue des Envierges. Ten years of his life were filled so full of confusion that they seemed, in the retrospect, nothing more than a simple extension of the sidewalk. Still he felt some astonishment in taking up his old habits again so easily. The exterior boulevards must have grown wider; he stopped to read the signs over the shops, surprised to see them there. It was not the frank joy of setting foot upon this longed-for corner of the earth; it was a mixture of tenderness, through which the burdens of songs were ringing, and of secret anxiety, — anxiety about the unknown, about these old familiar things that he had found again. His agitation grew still more violent as he drew near the rue des Envierges. He felt himself

turning weak; he had a great mind to go no farther, as if some catastrophe awaited him. Why had he come back? What was he going to do?

At last he walked up and down three times before the house in the rue des Envierges before he could make up his mind to go in. Across the street the charcoal man's shop had disappeared; it was now a fruiterer's, and the woman standing there in the doorway looked in such health, so thoroughly at home, that he did not dare to ask her the question he had on his lips. He preferred to risk all and go straight up to the concierge's door. How often had he not turned thus to the left and knocked at the little pane!

—— "Madame Damour, if you please?"

—— "Don't know her. . . . We've no one of that name here."

He stood still. Instead of the old concierge, who was an enormous woman, he saw before him a little, dried-up, crabbed hag who eyed him suspiciously. He went on,—

—— "Madame Damour used to live at the end of the passage, ten years ago."

—— "Ten years!" cried the concierge. "Ah well! a good deal of water has flowed under the bridges since then! . . . We've only been here since January."

—— "Madame Damour has perhaps left her address."

—— "No. Don't know her."

And, as he stuck to it, she got angry and threatened to call her husband.

—— "Ah there! will you have done spying about the house! . . . Heaps of people sneak in. . . ."

He blushed, and withdrew stammering, ashamed of his threadbare trousers and old dirty blouse. On the sidewalk he went away hanging his head; then he came back again, for he could not make up his mind to go away so. It was as if he were torn by an eternal farewell. They would take pity on him and tell him what he wanted to know. He raised his eyes and looked in at the windows, peered into the shops, trying to get his bearings once more. In those poor houses, where warnings to quit fall thick as hail, ten years had sufficed to change almost all the tenants. Moreover, one prudent instinct was left him, — a sort of affrighted savagery, mingled with shame, that made him tremble at the thought of being recognized. Walking down the street again, he at last noticed some familiar faces, — the woman in the tobacco shop, a grocer, a washerwoman, the baker he used to deal with. He

walked up and down before the shops for a quarter of an hour, all in a perspiration; he hesitated, wondering which one he would have the courage to go into, such havoc did his interior struggle with himself make in him. With a sinking heart he decided in favor of the baker's wife, a drowsy-looking woman, always white, as if she had just come out of a sack of flour. She looked at him without stirring from her counter. Certainly she did not recognize him with his tanned skin and bald head baked by the tropical sun, his long, wiry beard covering half his face. This gave him some courage, and, buying a roll for a sou, he ventured to ask,—

——"Haven't you among your customers a woman with a little girl? . . . Madame Damour?"

The baker's wife considered a little; then in her soft voice,—

——"Ah! yes, formerly, maybe. . . . But it was long ago. I don't quite remember. . . . One sees so many people!"

He had to put up with this answer. The next few days he came back to ask questions more boldly; but he found the same indifference everywhere, the same forgetfulness, together with contradictory directions that

threw him still more off the scent. Upon the whole it seemed certain that Félicie had left the neighborhood about two years after his going to Nouméa, at the very time of his escape; and no one knew her address. Some spoke of the Gros-Caillou, others of Bercy. They did not even remember little Louise. It was all over. One evening he sat down on a bench on the exterior boulevard and fell a-weeping, saying that he would not look for them any more. What was to become of him? Paris seemed empty. The few sous that had enabled him to return to France were nearly exhausted. One moment he resolved to go back to Belgium, to his coal mine, where it was so dark and he had lived without a memory, happy as a brute, in the overwhelming slumber of the earth. Yet he stayed on, and stayed on, wretched, starving, unable to get work. He was turned away everywhere; they thought him too old. He was only fifty-five, but was taken for seventy, after the wear and tear of his ten years of suffering. He prowled round like a wolf, went to look at the sites of the buildings burnt by the Commune, looked for such employment as is generally given to children or to the infirm. One of the stonecutters working at the Hôtel-de-Ville promised

to give him the care of their tools; but this promise was slow in keeping, and he was dying of hunger.

One day when he was watching the water flow by from the pont Notre-Dame, with that dizziness the poor feel when drawn toward suicide, he tore himself away from the parapet and, in so doing, nearly knocked over a passer-by, a big fellow in a white blouse, who began swearing at him.

——"You damned beast, you!"

But Damour stopped, open-mouthed, his eyes fixed upon the man.

——"Berru!" he cried out at last.

It really was Berru,—Berru much changed to his own advantage, florid of face and looking younger. Damour had often thought of him since his return; but where should he find his comrade, who changed lodgings every fortnight? Meanwhile the painter stared, and would not believe the other when he gave his name in a trembling voice.

——"It can't be! What a joke!"

But he did recognize him at last, and shouted so that a crowd began to gather on the sidewalk.

——"But you were dead! . . . If ever I expected this, you know? You don't fool peo-

ple that way. . . . Come, let's see; are you really and truly alive?"

Damour said nothing, but implored him to be quiet. Berru, who thought it, upon the whole, no end of a joke, at last took him under the arm and dragged him off to a wine shop in the rue Saint-Martin. He showered him with questions, he wanted to know all about it.

——"By and by," said Damour when they had sat down to table in a box. "First of all, my wife?"

Berru stared at him in dumb amazement.

——"How, your wife?"

——"Yes, where is she? Do you know her address?"

The painter's stupefaction grew apace. He said slowly,—

——"Of course, I know her address. . . . But you; then you don't know the story?"

——"What? What story?"

Then Berru burst out laughing.

——"Oh! that's too good, that is! How! you don't know about it? . . . But your wife's married again, old boy!"

Damour, who had his glass in his hand, set it down again upon the table, seized with such a fit of trembling that the wine trickled between his fingers. He wiped them on his blouse and repeated in a hollow voice,—

——"What do you tell me? Married again, married again. . . . You're sure?"

——"Damned sure! You were dead, she married again; there's nothing to be surprised at in that. . . . Only it's funny, because here you are, come back to life."

And as the poor man sat there, pale, with stammering lips, the painter told him all about it. Félicie was very well off now. She was married to a butcher in the rue des Moines at the Batignolles, a widower, whose business she looked after right well. Sagnard (the butcher's name was Sagnard) was a stout man of sixty, but thoroughly well preserved. On the corner of the rue Nollet, his shop, one with the best custom in the whole neighborhood, had gratings painted red, with gilt ox-heads at both ends of the sign.

——"What do you mean to do, then?" asked Berru, after every item in his story.

The unhappy man, stunned by the description of the shop, answered with a vague motion of his arm. He must see.

——"And Louise?" he asked of a sudden.

——"The little girl? Ah! I don't know. . . . They must have put her out somewhere to get rid of her, for I haven't seen her with them. . . . It's true, though, they might give you back the

child, seeing as they don't do anything with her. Only what would become of you, with a strapping girl of twenty on your hands? You don't look as if you were out for a holiday, hey? Without meaning to hurt your feelings, a man might say that people would chuck you a couple of sous in the street."

Damour hung his head, choking, and could not find a word to say. Berru ordered another litre, and tried to comfort him.

—— "Come, what the devil! seeing as you're alive, be jolly a bit. All isn't lost, it'll all come out straight. . . . What are you going to do?"

And the two men plunged into an endless discussion, in the course of which the same arguments kept coming up again and again. What the painter did not tell was that, directly after the convict's departure, he had tried to make up to Félicie, whose big shoulders he found very tempting. He owed her a grudge, too, for preferring the butcher Sagnard to him, on account of his fortune no doubt. When he had had the third litre brought, he cried, —

—— "In your place, I'd go to their house and make myself at home there, and fire Sagnard out of the door, if he bothered me. . . . You're master, after all. You've got the law on your side."

Little by little, Damour was getting drunk. The wine brought flames to his wan cheeks. He repeated that he must see about it. But Berru kept egging him on, slapping him on the back and asking him if he were a man. Of course he was a man; and he had loved that woman so! He still loved her enough to set Paris on fire, to get her back. Well, then, what was he waiting for? As she was his, all he had to do was to take her back. The two men were very drunk by this time, and talking vehemently straight into each other's faces.

——"I'm going there!" said Damour abruptly, finding some difficulty in getting upon his feet again.

——"Now you're talking! It would have been too chicken-livered!" cried Berru. "I'll go with you."

And they set out for the Batignolles.

III

On the corner of the rue des Moines and the rue Nollet, the shop had a rich look, with its red iron gratings and gilt ox-heads. Quarters of beef and pork hung above white sheets, while rows of legs of mutton, like bouquets in cornucopias of paper with openwork edges, swung in festoons. There were heaped-up piles of meat on marble slabs,—pieces cut and trimmed, pink veal, dark red mutton, scarlet beef, veined with fat like colored marble. Copper basins, the beam of a pair of scales, a row of hooks, shone bright. There was an abundance, a full bloom of health in the sunny shop, paved with marble and open to the street, a good smell of fresh meat that seemed to bring the blood to the cheeks of all the people of the house.

At the back of the shop, full in the blaze of light from the street, sat Félicie at a high counter, where panes of plate glass sheltered her from the draughts. In there amid the cheery, shimmering reflections in the rosy

light, she looked very fresh, with that full, mature freshness of women who are past forty. Clean, smooth of skin, with her bands of black hair and white collar, she had the smiling, busy gravity of a good business woman who, pen in hand, represents the fair dealing and prosperity of a house. Butcher boys were cutting, weighing, calling out figures; customers filed before the office; and she took their money while exchanging with them the news of the neighborhood in her pleasant voice. Just then a woman with a sickly face was paying for two cutlets, at which she looked with a mournful eye.

——"Fifteen sous, isn't it?" said Félicie. "So you're no better, madame Vernier?"

——"No, no better; still poorly in the stomach. I can't keep anything down. And the doctor says I must have meat; but it's so dear! . . . You know the charcoal man's dead."

——"You don't say so!"

——"It wasn't the stomach with him, it was the bowels. . . . Two cutlets, fifteen sous! Poultry ain't so dear as that."

——"Lord! it isn't our fault, madame Vernier. We don't know how we're going to pull through ourselves. . . . What's the matter, Charles?"

But she did not wait for him to answer.

She had recognized one of the two men who were coming in, the one who came first.

—— "Ah! it's you, monsieur Berru."

She hardly looked pleased, her pursed-up lips giving a pout of contempt. The two men had made several stoppages at wine shops on their way from the rue Saint-Martin to the Batignolles, for it was a long walk and their mouths were dry; they spoke very loud, still disputing between themselves. They showed their liquor, too, quite plainly. On the sidewalk opposite, Damour had a shock that made his heart stop beating when Berru, with an abrupt jerk of his thumb, pointed out Félicie, so young and handsome amid the plate glass of her counter, saying, "There! that's her!" It could not be she; it must be Louise, looking so like her mother; for surely Félicie was older. And all that rich shop, the bleeding meat, the shining copper, and then that well-dressed woman, looking like a bourgeoise, with her hand in a pile of gold, quenched his anger and made him really afraid. He felt like running off as fast as his legs could carry him, ashamed, turning pale at the thought of going in there. Never would that lady consent to take him back now, looking so seedy with his great beard and dirty blouse. He turned on

his heel and was for running down the rue des Moines so as not to be seen, when Berru held him back.

——"God's thunder! haven't you got any blood in your veins? . . . Well, then, in your place, I'd make the lady of the house skip! And I wouldn't go without my share, either; yes, half the legs of mutton and the rest. . . . Will you walk in, or will you not? You wet rag, you!"

And he made Damour cross the street. Then, first asking one of the boys if monsieur Sagnard were in, and finding that the butcher was at the slaughterhouse, he went in ahead, to hasten matters. Damour followed choking, looking like a fool.

——"What can I do for you, monsieur Berru?" Félicie asked in her not engaging voice.

——"It isn't for myself," replied the painter, "it's for my comrade, who has something to say to you."

He stepped aside, and now Damour stood face to face with Félicie. She looked at him; he cast down his eyes, horribly embarrassed and suffering tortures. At first she gave a pout of disgust, her calm, happy face expressed repugnance at this old drunkard who

smelt of the poorhouse. But she kept looking at him; and suddenly, before she had exchanged a word with him, she turned white, stifling a cry and dropping the money she had in her hand; you could hear its clear ring as it fell into the till.

——"What's the matter? you're sick?" asked madame Vernier, who had stayed on from curiosity.

Félicie motioned them all to go, with a wave of her hand. She could not speak. Moving with difficulty, she got up and walked toward the dining-room at the back of the shop. Without her bidding them follow, the two men disappeared after her, Berru grinning, Damour with his eyes fixed upon the marble floor, covered with sawdust, as if he were afraid of falling.

——"Well, it's queer, all the same!" muttered madame Vernier when she was left alone with the boys.

The latter had stopped cutting and weighing, and were exchanging glances of surprise. But they did not wish to commit themselves, and went back to their work, looking indifferent and not answering their customer, who went away with her cutlets in her hand, eyeing them hard, in no good humor,

In the dining-room Félicie did not seem to think herself enough out of hearing from the shop. She pushed open a second door, and showed the two men into her bedroom. It was a very neat room, shut up close, quiet, with white curtains to the bed and window, a gilt clock, and mahogany furniture, on which the varnish shone bright, without a grain of dust. Félicie let herself drop into a blue rep arm-chair, and kept repeating these words, —

—— "It's you . . . it's you. . . ."

Damour could find nothing to say. He looked about the room, and did not dare to sit down because the chairs looked too fine. So it was again Berru who began,—

—— "Yes, he's been looking for you for a fortnight. . . . Then he met me, and I've brought him along."

Then, as if he still felt that he ought to excuse himself to her,—

—— "You see, I couldn't do anything else. He's an old comrade, and it went to my heart to see him so down on his luck."

Meanwhile Félicie had come a little to herself. She was the cooler head of the two, also in better condition than he. When she had got over her choking, she began to look for an issue out of an intolerable situation, and opened the terrible explanation.

——"Come, Jacques, let us see; what have you come to ask of me?"

He made no answer.

——"It is true," she went on, "I married again. But that was no fault of mine; you know that. I thought you dead, and you did nothing to undeceive me."

Damour at last spoke,—

——"Yes, I wrote to you."

——"I swear to you that I never got your letters. You know me, you know I've never told a lie. . . . And see! I have the certificate here in a drawer."

She opened a secretary, feverishly drew a paper from it, and handed it to Damour, who began to read it as if in a stupor. It was his certificate of decease. She added,—

——"After that I found myself quite alone. I yielded to the offer of a man who wished to take me out of my poverty and my troubles. . . . There is all my guilt. I let myself be tempted by the thought of being happy. That is no crime, is it?"

He listened, hanging his head, more humble and embarrassed than she herself. Yet he raised his eyes.

——"And my daughter?"

She began to tremble once more. She stammered out,—

——"Your daughter? . . . I don't know, I haven't got her."

——"How?"

——"No, I sent her to live at my aunt's. . . . She ran away, she went to the bad."

Damour was silent for a moment, looking very calm, as if he had not understood her. Then, embarrassed as he had been, he suddenly brought his fist down upon the chest of drawers with such violence that a box of shellwork danced on the marble top. But he did not have time to speak, for two children, a little boy of six and a little girl of four, had just opened the door and thrown themselves round Félicie's neck in an outburst of joy.

——"Good morning, little mother, we've been to the garden at the end of the street. . . . Françoise said we must come home. . . . Oh! if you only knew, there's sand there and chickens in the water. . . ."

——"That will do, go away," said their mother roughly.

And, calling the maid,—

——"Françoise, take them away. . . . It's stupid to come home at this time."

The children went with their hearts in their mouths; while the nurse, hurt by madame's tone, pushed them angrily before her. Félicie

had an insane terror that Jacques might steal them from her; he might throw them across his shoulders and make off. Berru, who had not been asked to take a seat, stretched himself out coolly in the other arm-chair, whispering in his friend's ear,—

——"The little Sagnards. . . . Brat-seed sprouts quick! Hey?"

When the door was shut, Damour struck the chest of drawers another blow with his fist, crying out,—

——"All that isn't it; I want my daughter, and I've come to get you."

Félicie turned cold as ice.

——"Sit down, and let us talk it over," said she. "It will do no good to make a noise. . . . So you have come for me?"

——"Yes, you'll follow me right off. . . . I'm your husband, the only right one. Oh! I know my rights. . . . It is my right, Berru, isn't it? . . . Come, put on your cap; be nice, if you don't want all the world to know our affairs."

She looked at him, and, in spite of herself, her agitated face showed that she no longer loved him, that he frightened and disgusted her with his hideous pauper senility. What! was she, so white, so plump, accustomed now to all the bourgeois luxuries, to begin over again the

rough, poor life of yore with this man who came upon her like a ghost!

—— "You refuse," Damour resumed, reading it in her face. "Oh! I understand; you've got used to playing the lady at your counter, and I've no fine shop, and no till full of money for you to rummage round in as you please. . . . Then there are the young ones that were here a while ago; you seem to keep them better than you did Louise. When people have lost the daughter, they're quite ready to let the father go hang! . . . But that's all one to me. I want you to come along, and you will come, or else I'll go to the commissary of police and get him to fetch you home for me with gendarmes. . . . It's my right, isn't it, Berru?"

The painter nodded his head in confirmation. This scene amused him hugely. Still, when he saw that Damour was furious, intoxicated with his own words, and Félicie at her wits' end, almost sobbing and ready to faint, he thought it best to play the noble part in the drama. He interposed sententiously, —

—— "Yes, yes, it's your right; but we must see, we must think it over. . . . I've always acted like a gentleman. . . . Before we decide anything it would be the proper thing for us to speak to monsieur Sagnard, and, as he isn't here . . ."

He stopped short for a moment, then went on in an altered voice, trembling with sham emotion, —

—— "Only, my comrade's in a hurry. It's hard to wait in his condition. . . . Ah! madame, if you knew how he's suffered! And now, not a red herring, he's starving, he's turned away everywhere. . . . When I met him just now he hadn't eaten a thing since yesterday."

Félicie, passing from fear to sudden tender-heartedness, could not keep back the tears that choked her. It was a boundless sadness, a regret and disgust with life. A cry escaped her, —

—— "Forgive me, Jacques!"

And when she could speak, —

—— "What's done is done. But I don't want you to be wretched. . . . Let me help you."

Damour made a violent motion with his arm.

—— "Sure enough," said Berru quickly, "the house here's full enough for your wife not to let you go with an empty belly. . . . Say that you refuse her money, you can still accept a present. If you were to give him only a piece of meat, he could make himself some broth, couldn't he, madame?"

—— "Oh! anything he likes, monsieur Berru."

But he began pounding upon the chest of drawers again, crying out, —

—— "Thank you, I don't eat of that bread."

And stepping up to his wife and looking her in the eye, —

—— "It's only you I want, and I will have you. . . . Keep your meat!"

Félicie drew back, seized once more with repugnance and terror. Then Damour's anger broke out, and he spoke of smashing everything in the house; he made abominable accusations in his rage. He would have his daughter's address, he shook his wife in her chair, shouting out that she had sold the little girl; and she did not defend herself, in the stupor into which all these occurrences had plunged her, but kept slowly repeating that she did not know the address, that it surely could be got at the prefecture of police. At last Damour flung himself into a chair, swearing that the devil himself should not make him stir from it; but the next moment he sprang up suddenly and, with a last blow with his fist, more violent than the others, —

—— "Well, then! God's thunder! I'm going. . . . Yes, I'm going, because I want to. . . . But you'll lose nothing by waiting. I'll come back when your man is here and I'll

settle you all; him, you, the kids, and the whole damned shebang. . . . Just you wait, you'll see!"

He went out, shaking his fist threateningly at her. Upon the whole, he felt it a relief to be over with it so. Berru stayed behind and said in a conciliatory tone, delighted to be mixed up in such an affair,—

——"Don't be afraid, I won't leave him. . . . We must see that nothing unlucky happens."

He even plucked up courage to take her hand and kiss it. She let him go on, she was broken down; if her husband had taken her by the arm, she would have followed him. Still, she listened to the steps of the two men as they passed out of the shop. One of the boys was cutting up a loin of mutton with great strokes of his cleaver. Voices were calling out figures. Then her good business woman's instinct brought her back to the counter, amid the clear panes of plate glass, very pale, but very calm, as if nothing had happened.

——"How much to take out?" she asked.

——"Seven francs, fifty, madame."

And she handed back the change.

IV

Next day Damour had a stroke of luck: the stonecutter took him as watchman at the works at the Hôtel-de-Ville. And so he had charge of the building he had helped burn down, ten years before. It was light work, upon the whole, one of those sleepy jobs that benumb the faculties. At night he prowled round under the scaffolding, listening to noises and falling asleep from time to time on sacks of lime. He said nothing more about going back to the Batignolles. But one morning that Berru came to stand treat to a breakfast, he cried out at the third litre that the grand stroke was to come off the next day. Next day he did not leave the works; and after that it was a regular thing for him to get angry and talk about his rights only when in liquor. When sober he was gloomy, preoccupied, and as if ashamed of himself. The painter twitted him with it, telling him at last that he was no man. But he looked serious and muttered, —

—— "I must kill them, then! . . . I'm waiting till I feel like it."

One evening he set out and got as far as the place Moncey; then, after passing an hour on a bench, he went back to the works. That day he thought he had seen his daughter pass by the Hôtel-de-Ville, lounging on the cushions of a superb landau. Berru offered to make investigations; he was sure he could find out Louise's address in twenty-four hours. But he would not hear of it. What was the good of knowing it? Nevertheless, the thought that the beautiful woman, so well dressed, of whom he had caught a glimpse trotting by behind two big white horses, might be his daughter, turned his stomach. He bought a knife and showed it to his comrade, saying it was to bleed the butcher with. The expression caught his fancy, he was forever repeating it with a jeering laugh.

—— "I'll bleed the butcher. . . . Every one in his turn, ain't that so?"

Then Berru would keep him at a wine shop in the rue du Temple for hours on the stretch, trying to convince him that there was no need of bleeding anybody. It was silly, because, to begin with, you got cut down a head shorter for it; and he took his hands and made him swear that he would not get himself into any nasty scrape. Damour would repeat with his obstinate laugh, —

—— "No, no, every one in his turn. . . . I'll bleed the butcher."

Days passed by; he did not bleed him.

Something happened that seemed as if it must bring matters to a crisis. He was discharged from the works as incompetent; one stormy night he had fallen asleep and let a shovel be stolen. Then he began his life of starving, loafing about the streets, still too proud to beg, peering into the roast-meat shops with glistening eyes. But instead of stimulating him, want benumbed him. He gave in, looking like a man plunged in sad thoughts. You would have said that he did not dare show himself at the Batignolles, now that he had not a clean blouse to put on.

Félicie, at the Batignolles, was constantly on tenter-hooks. On the evening of Damour's visit she did not feel that she could tell Sagnard. The next day, the thought that she had not told him then tormented her, and she had a fit of remorse, but could not muster courage to speak out; and she was continually trembling, expecting to see her first husband come in at any minute, imagining atrocious scenes. The worst of it was that they must have suspected something in the shop, for the boys grinned sarcastically and, when madame Vernier came

regularly for her two cutlets, she had a suspicious way of picking up her change. At last Félicie threw herself round Sagnard's neck one day, and sobbed out a confession of the whole business. She told him what she had said to Damour: it was not her fault, for, when people are dead, they ought not come back again. Sagnard, who was still very fresh for his sixty years and a thoroughly good fellow, tried to comfort her. Good Lord! the thing was no joke, but it would all come out right in the end. Did not everything get settled? He, a fellow with money and well set up in life, felt more curiosity than anything else about it. They would see this ghost and have a talk with him. The story interested him, and to such a degree that, as the other did not appear a week later, he said to his wife, —

—— "Well! what now? He's giving us the slip? . . . If you knew his address, I'd go and see him myself."

Then, as she implored him to be quiet, he added,—

—— "But, my dear girl, I want to reassure you. . . . I see plainly that you are undermining your health. We must have it over."

It was true, Félicie was growing thinner under the threat of the impending drama, the

very waiting for which but added to her anguish. One day, at last, the butcher was scolding one of the boys for forgetting to change the water in which a calf's head was soaking, when she came up to him, white, stammering out, —

—— "Here he is!"

—— "Oh! very well!" said Sagnard, calming down immediately. "Show him into the dining-room."

And without hurrying, he turned to the boy, —

—— "Wash it under the faucet, it's smelling up the whole place."

He went into the dining-room, where he found Damour and Berru. Their coming together was an accident. Berru had met Damour in the rue de Clichy; he did not see so much of him as he used to, being tired of his poverty. But when he learned that his comrade was going to the rue des Moines, he broke out into expostulations, for this affair was his business, too. And he began to take him to task, shouting out that he would stop his going over there to make a fool of himself; he blocked the sidewalk in his endeavors to make him up put his knife. Damour shrugged his shoulders, looking obstinate, and with a notion in his head which he kept to himself.

He answered all the other's objections with, —

—— "Come along, if you want to, but don't bother me."

In the dining-room Sagnard let the two men stand. Félicie fled into her own room, taking the children with her. She double-locked the door in a frenzy of fear, and sat down behind it, holding her little ones clasped tight to her bosom, as if to guard and defend them. Meanwhile she listened, though her ears were buzzing with anxiety, but could as yet hear nothing; for the two husbands in the next room stood looking at each other in embarrassed silence.

—— "So it's you?" said Sagnard at last, to say something.

—— "Yes, it's I," answered Damour.

He thought Sagnard very fit looking, and felt himself lessened in his own eyes. The butcher hardly looked over fifty; he was a handsome man, fresh faced, with his hair clipped short and no beard. In his shirt sleeves, wrapped in a large white apron that shone like snow, he had all the cheerful look of youth.

—— "You see," Damour resumed after some hesitation, "it isn't you I want to have a word with, but Félicie."

At this Sagnard regained all his self-possession.

——"Come, comrade, let us understand one another. What, the devil! neither of us has anything to blame the other for. Why should we have a row about it, seeing that it was nobody's fault?"

Damour hung his head and looked doggedly at one of the legs of the table. He muttered in a hollow voice,—

——"I'm not blaming you, leave me alone, go away. I want to speak to Félicie."

——"As for that, no, you can't speak to her," the butcher answered quietly. "I've no mind to have you make her sick, as you did the other day. We can talk without her. . . . Besides, all will be well if you don't make a row. As you say you still love her, consider the situation, think it over, and act for her happiness."

——"You shut up!" the other interrupted him, in sudden anger. "Don't you put your finger in the pie, or all will go wrong."

Berru thought him about to draw his knife from his pocket, and threw himself between the two men with a great show of zeal. But Damour thrust him back.

——"Dry up, you too! What are you afraid of? You're making an idiot of yourself!

——"Keep cool!" repeated Sagnard. "When a man's mad, he doesn't know what he's

about. . . . Listen: if I call Félicie, promise me to behave yourself, because she's very sensitive; you know that as well as I. Neither of us wants to kill her, do we? . . . Will you behave decently?"

——"Eh! if I'd come here to be ugly, I'd have stopped your windpipe to start with, with all your talk!"

He said this in a tone of such profound sorrow that it seemed to make a strong impression upon the butcher.

——"Then," said he, "I will call Félicie. Oh! I'm very just, I can understand that you want to talk it over with her. You have a right to."

He stepped up to the door and knocked.

——"Félicie! Félicie!"

Then, as he heard no one stirring, for Félicie, chilled at the thought of this interview, sat riveted to her chair, clasping her children tighter to her breast, he grew impatient.

——"Felicie, come, will you? . . . You're acting foolishly now. He promises to be reasonable."

At last the key turned in the lock, she came in and shut the door carefully behind her, to leave her children in safety. Again there was an embarrassed silence. They were all cocked and primed, as Berru said.

Damour spoke slowly and in more and more involved sentences, while Sagnard stood at the window and raised one of the little white curtains with his finger, pretending to look out, to show that he was liberal in business matters.

—— "Listen, Félicie; you know I've never been ugly. You can agree to that. . . . Well, I don't mean to begin to-day. At first I meant to cut all your throats here. Then I asked myself what I should gain by that. . . . I had rather leave you free to make your own choice. We will do as you say. Yes, seeing as the courts can't do anything for us with their justice, it's for you to decide what you had rather do. Answer. . . . With which of us will you go, Félicie?"

But she could not answer. Emotion choked her.

—— "Very well," Damour resumed in the same hollow voice, "I understand; you're going with him. . . . I knew how it would turn out when I came here. . . . And I bear you no grudge; I say you're right, after all. As for me, it's all over with me. I have nothing. The long and short of it is that you no longer love me, while he makes you happy, not to speak of there being the two young ones. . . ."

Félicie was weeping, entirely upset.

—— "You're wrong to cry, I'm not blaming you. Things have turned out this way, that's all. . . . And so, I had a mind to see you once more, to tell you that you could sleep in peace. Now that you've made your choice, I won't trouble you any longer. It's all over, you'll never hear of me again."

He walked toward the door; but S'gnard, who was very much moved, stopped him, crying out, —

—— "Ah! you're a good fellow, that you are! . . . We can't possibly part like this. You'll dine with us."

—— "No, thanks," answered Damour.

Berru, who was much astonished and thought this a queer upshot to the affair, seemed thoroughly scandalized at his comrade's declining the invitation.

—— "At least we'll have a drink," the butcher went on. "You'll not refuse a glass of wine under our roof, or the devil's in it!"

Damour did not accept at once. He looked slowly round the clean, cheerful dining-room, with its white-oak furniture. Then, as his glance stopped at Félicie, imploring him with her face bathed in tears, he said, —

—— "Yes, after all."

Sagnard was delighted. He cried,—

——"Quick, Félicie, some glasses! We don't need the girl. . . . Four glasses. You must drink with us too. . . . Ah! comrade, it's awfully nice of you to accept. You don't know how pleased I am, for I like good-hearted folks; and you've got a good heart, I'll go bail for that!"

Meanwhile Félicie, with trembling hands, went to the sideboard for some glasses and a litre. She had lost her head, and could not find anything. Sagnard had to help her. Then, when the wine was poured out, the company round the table clinked glasses.

——"Your health!"

As Damour stood opposite Félicie, he had to stretch out his arm to touch her glass. Both looked at each other in silence, with their past in their eyes. She was trembling so that you could hear the glasses ring together like the chattering of teeth in high fever. They had stopped tutoyéing each other; they were as if dead, living henceforth only in memory.

——"Your health!"

And, as all four were drinking, the children's voices were heard in the next room in the midst of the dead silence. They had begun to play, running after each other with screams

of laughter. They rapped on the door and called out, "Mamma! mamma!"

——"There! Good by, all!" said Damour, setting down his glass upon the table.

He went away. Félicie, quite erect and pale, watched him go, while Sagnard accompanied the gentlemen as far as the door.

V

In the street Damour began to walk so fast that Berru could hardly keep up with him. The painter was boiling over. At the boulevard des Batignolles, when he saw his companion throw himself upon a bench, with his legs giving way under him, and sit there with white cheeks and fixed eyes, he let out all that was in his heart. He would at least have boxed the ears of the gentleman and lady of the house. It made him tired to see a husband give up his wife to another man in that way, without laying an anchor to windward for himself. A man must be jolly green, yes, green, to use no worse word! And he quoted an example, another communist who had found his wife keeping company with a gentleman; well! the two men and the woman were now living together and agreeing very well. A man ought to fix things and not let himself be made a goose of; for, after all, he was the goose in all this business!

—— "You don't understand," Damour an-

swered. "And get out, you too, as long as you're not my friend."

—— "Me not your friend! when I've been moving heaven and earth! . . . Listen to reason a bit. What's to become of you? You've nobody, here you are on the street like a dog, and you'll die if I don't get you out of the scrape. . . . Not your friend! Why, if I shake you there's nothing left for you but to put your head under your wing, like a chicken that's tired of life."

Damour made a despairing gesture. It was true, there was nothing for it now but to throw himself into the water, or get taken up by the police.

—— "Well, then!" the painter went on, "I'm so much your friend that I'm going to take you to somebody's house where you can have board and lodging."

So saying, he got up, as if taking a sudden resolution. He dragged his companion away by main force, he stammering out,—

—— "But where? where?"

—— "You'll see. . . . As you won't dine at your wife's, you'll dine somewhere else. . . . Just you put that in your pipe; I'm not going to let you make a fool of yourself twice in the same day."

He walked on briskly, turning down the rue d'Amsterdam. In the rue de Berlin he stopped before a small private house, rang, and asked the footman who came to the door if madame de Savigny were at home. As the man hesitated, he added, —

—— "Go and tell her it's Berru."

Damour followed him mechanically. This unexpected call at this luxurious house finished him; he felt light-headed. He went up-stairs. Then, all at once, he found himself in the arms of a little fair-haired woman, very pretty and all but undressed in a lace wrapper. And she cried out,—

—— "Papa, it's papa! . . . Oh! how nice of you to have made up his mind to come!"

She was free-and-easily good-natured; she did not mind the old man's grimy blouse; she was delighted, and clapped her hands in a sudden fit of filial affection. Her father was dumfounded, and did not even recognize her.

—— "Why, it's Louise!" said Berru.

Then he stammered out, —

—— "Ah! yes. . . . You're too kind. . . ."

He did not dare to tutoyer her. Louise made him sit down on a sofa, and then rang to say that she was not at home to any one. He, the while, looked round the room, which was hung

in cashmere and furnished with an exquisite richness that went to his heart. And Berru slapped him on the back in triumph, repeating, —

—— "Hey? Will you ever say again that I'm no friend? . . . I knew well enough that you couldn't get along without your daughter. So I got her address and came and told her your story. She said right off, 'Bring him here!'"

—— "Why, of course, this poor father of mine!" murmured Louise in a caressing voice. "Oh! you know, I've a horror of your republic. A dirty lot, who'd ruin everybody if you let them have their way! . . . But you, you're my dear papa. I remember how good you used to be when I was sick, when I was quite a little girl. You'll see, we shall get on capitally together, if we never talk politics. . . . To begin with, we'll have dinner, all three of us. Oh! how nice it is!"

She sat down, almost on the workman's knees, laughing, with her bright eyes and her fine sandy hair flying about her ears. His strength was quite gone, he was overcome by a delicious sensation of well-being. He would have liked to refuse, because it did not seem honest to sit down to table in that house. But

he could no longer summon up his energy of a while ago, when he left the butcher's wife without even turning his head, after they had clinked glasses for the last time. His daughter was too gentle, and her little white hands, laid in his, bound him fast.

—— "Come, you accept?" Louise said.

—— "Yes," he answered at last, while two tears ran down his cheeks, all hollowed out by want and wretchedness.

Berru thought him very sensible. As they were passing into the dining-room, a footman came to tell madame that monsieur was there.

—— "I can't see him," she answered quietly. "Tell him, I am with my father. . . . To-morrow at six, if he likes."

The dinner was delightful. Berru enlivened it with every sort of funny sally, at which Louise laughed till she cried. She fancied herself once more in the rue des Envierges, and it was a treat. Damour ate a great deal, heavy with fatigue and food; but he would give a smile of exquisite tenderness whenever his daughter's eyes met his. At dessert they drank a sweet wine that sparkled like champagne, and got them all three by the head. Then, when the servants had left the room, they sat with their elbows on the table and talked of bygone days in the

melancholy of their intoxication. Berru rolled a cigarette and Louise smoked it, with her eyes half closed, and her face bathed in dreamy enchantment. She grew confused in her recollections, fell to talking about her lovers, about the first one, a tall young man who had done things in very good style. Then she let slip some very severe reflections upon her mother.

—— "You understand," she said to her father, "I can't see her any more, she behaves too bad. . . . I'll go, if you like, and tell her what I think of the nasty way she's given you the shake."

But Damour solemnly declared that she was dead to him. Of a sudden Louise sprang up, crying out, —

—— "By the way, I'll show you something that'll please you."

She disappeared, but came back directly with her cigarette still between her lips, and handed her father an old, time-yellowed photograph, worn at the corners. It gave the workman a shock; fixing his dim eyes upon the likeness, he stammered out, —

—— "Eugène, my poor Eugène."

He passed the card to Berru, and he, too, was much affected, murmuring, —

—— "It's very like."

Then came Louise's turn. She kept the photograph a minute; but her tears choked her, and she handed it back, saying, —

—— "Oh! I remember him. . . . He was so nice!"

All three gave way to their emotion, and wept together. Twice more did the likeness make the round of the table, amid the most affecting reflections. It was much faded by exposure to the air. Poor Eugène, dressed in his national guard's uniform, looked like the shadow of a rioter, lost in the dimness of legend. But on turning the card over, his father read what he had written there long ago, "I will avenge you"; and brandishing a dessert knife above his head, he repeated his oath,—

—— "Yes, yes, I will avenge you!"

—— "When I saw mamma was going to the bad," said Louise, "I didn't like to leave her my poor brother's picture. So, one evening, I ragged it of her. . . . It's for you, papa. I give it to you."

Damour stood the photograph up against his glass, and kept looking at it. Still, they got to talking rationally at last. Louise was for getting her father out of his troubles, honor bright! For a moment she spoke of having

him at her own house; but that was hardly feasible. At last an idea struck her: she asked him if he would be willing to look after a piece of property a gentleman had just bought for her, near Mantes? There was a lodge there, in which he could live very comfortably on two hundred francs a month.

——"Why, of course he will! Why, it's Paradise!" cried Berru, accepting for his comrade. "If he gets bored, I'll come and see him."

Next week Damour was settled at le Bel-Air, his daughter's place; and there he still lives, enjoying a repose which Providence fully owed him, after all the misfortunes she had poured out upon his head. He is growing fat and blooming once more, dresses like a bourgeois, and shows the good-natured, honest face of an old soldier. The peasants bow very low to him. He goes shooting and fishing. You meet him in the sunshine on the roads, watching the wheat grow, with the quiet conscience of a man who has robbed no one, and is living on a hard-earned income. When his daughter comes down with gentlemen, he knows his place and keeps it. His great delight is when she takes a day off, and they have breakfast together in the little lodge. Then he talks baby talk to

her, and gazes at her toilets as in adoration; and those are dainty breakfasts, all sorts of good things that he has cooked himself, not to mention the dessert of cakes and lollipops which Louise brings down in her pocket.

Damour has never tried to see his wife again. He has only his daughter left, his daughter who took pity on her old father and is his pride and joy. For the rest, he has equally neglected taking any steps to re-establish his civil status. What would be the use of disturbing the government records? This redoubles the tranquillity of his life. He is in his hole, hidden, forgotten, belongs to no one, and does not blush at his daughter's gifts; whereas, were he to be brought to life again, envious people might very likely make ill-natured reflections on his situation, and he himself might suffer by it in the long run.

But sometimes there are great goings-on at the lodge. These are when Berru comes down to spend four or five days in the country. At last he was found, at Damour's, the lubberland of his dreams. He goes shooting and fishing with his friend; spends days on his back by the river-side. Then in the evening the two comrades talk politics. Berru brings down anarchist newspapers from Paris; and,

after they have read them, both agree as to what radical measures should be adopted, — fusillading the government, hanging the bourgeoisie, burning Paris, to rebuild another city, the true city of the people. They are still pegging away at universal felicity, to be obtained by general extermination. At last, when Damour goes to bed, he steps up to Eugène's photograph, which he has had framed, looks at it, brandishes his pipe, and cries out, —

—— "Yes, yes, I will avenge you!"

And next morning he returns to his fishing, with rounded shoulders and a rested countenance, while Berru lies stretched out on the bank asleep, with his nose in the grass.

MADAME NEIGEON

MADAME NEIGEON

I

A WEEK ago my father, M. de Vaugelade, gave his consent to my leaving le Boquet, the gloomy old château in Lower Normandy, where I was born. My father has queer notions about the present; he is a good half-century behind the age. So at last I am living in Paris! I hardly knew it before, except for passing through it twice. Luckily I am not too awkward. When Félix Budin, an old schoolfellow of mine at the lycée in Caën, saw me again here, he said I was superb and that every woman in Paris would dote on me. It made me laugh. But, when Félix was gone, I caught myself staring at my five-feet-six in a looking-glass, and smiling with my white teeth and black eyes. Then I shrugged my shoulders, for I am not vain.

Yesterday I spent the evening for the first time in a Paris drawing-room. The comtesse de P***, who is a sort of aunt of mine, had invited me to dinner. It was her last Satur-

day. She wished to introduce me to M. Neigeon, a deputy from our arrondissement of Gommerville, who has just been appointed sub-secretary of State and is, they say, in a fair way to be minister. My aunt, who is far more tolerant than my father, maintains that a young man of my age must not go into the sulks about his country, were it even a republic. She wants to get me a place somewhere.

——'I take it upon myself to catechise that obstinate old Vaugelade," said she. "Leave it to me, my dear Georges."

At seven sharp I was at the countess's. But it seems they dine late in Paris; the guests were dropping in, one by one, and at half after seven they had not all come. The countess told me with a look of despair that she had not been able to get M. Neigeon: he was kept at Versailles by some parliamentary complication. Nevertheless, she hoped he would show himself for a minute in the course of the evening. As a stop-gap she had invited another deputy from our department, the big Gaucheraud, as we call him out there; I knew him from having been out shooting with him once. This Gaucheraud is a thickset, jolly man; he has grown whiskers lately to give himself the appearance of a person of conse-

quence. He was born in Paris, where his father was a small attorney with no fortune to speak of; but he has a rich and very influential uncle down our way, who got him, I don't quite know how, to relinquish a candidature in his favor. I did not know he was married. My aunt placed me at table beside a young fair lady, very shrewd looking and pretty, whom the big Gaucheraud called Berthe, very loud.

At last our number was full. It was still daylight in the drawing-room, which had a western exposure, and suddenly we went into a room with curtains drawn, lighted up by a chandelier and several lamps. The effect was singular. Besides, while taking their seats, they talked about the last dinners of the winter season being made gloomy by the twilight. My aunt abominated that sort of thing. And the conversation seemed as if it would harp eternally on this theme, on the cheerlessness of crossing Paris at nightfall when driving out to dine. I said nothing, but I had by no means experienced this sensation in my fiacre, though it had jolted me hard enough for half an hour. Paris, at the first gas light, filled me with a boundless desire for all the pleasures with which it was soon to blaze.

With the entrées voices were pitched higher, and they talked politics. I was surprised to hear my aunt express opinions. The other ladies, for matter of that, were well up in the subject, called prominent men by their names without the handles, judged and passed sentence upon them. Opposite me, Gaucheraud took up an enormous amount of room, talking loud without stopping eating and drinking. These things did not interest me; many points I did not understand, and I ended by attending only to my neighbor, madame Gaucheraud, Berthe, as I already called her to myself, for short. She was really very pretty. Her ear struck me as especially fascinating,— a little, round ear, with her yellow hair curling behind it. The back of Berthe's neck, covered with stray frizzes, was particularly disquieting, as is often the case with fair women. At certain movements of her shoulders the body of her dress, cut low in a square, gaped open a little behind, and I followed, from her neck to her waist, a supple, catlike undulation. Her rather sharp profile pleased me less. She talked politics more desperately than the rest.

—— "Madame, will you have some wine? May I pass you the salt, madame?"

I did the polite, I forestalled her slightest

wishes, interpreting every movement of her hand or eye. She had looked at me fixedly while seating herself at table, as if to take my measure at a glance.

—— "Politics bore you," she said at last. "But what can one do? one must talk. People talk about nothing else nowadays."

Then she skipped to another topic.

—— "Is Gommerville pretty? My husband wanted to take me to his uncle's last summer; but I was afraid, I pretended to be ill."

—— "The crops are very good," I answered. "There are fine meadows there."

—— "That's enough! I know all about it," she rejoined, laughing. "It must be frightful. Nothing but flat country, fields after fields, with the same screen of poplars over and over again, as far as the eye can see."

I wanted to object, but she was already off again, discussing a bill on higher education with her neighbor on the right, a grave man with a white beard. At last the conversation turned to the stage. When she leaned forward to answer a question from the other end of the table, the feline undulation of the back of her neck gave me a sensation. At le Boquet, in the secret impatience of my loneliness, I had dreamt of a fair-haired mistress; but she was

slow in her movements, of noble countenance; and Berthe's mouse-face and little curly locks disturbed my dream. Then, as the vegetables were being passed round, I glided into a mad story, the details of which I invented as I went on: we were alone, she and I; I was kissing her on the neck from behind, and she turned round smiling; then we set out together for a very far-off country. The dessert was passed. Just then she pressed up against me, and said in a low voice, —

—— "Do give me that plate of bonbons, there, in front of you."

It seemed to me that her eyes had a caressing softness, and the light pressure of her bare arm against my coat sleeve warmed me delightfully.

—— "I adore sweet things; and you?" she said, resuming her talk with me while nibbling a candied fruit.

These simple words stirred me up to the pitch of thinking myself in love. As I raised my head, I saw Gaucheraud looking at me as I talked in an undertone with his wife. He seemed in capital spirits; he smiled at me encouragingly. The husband's smile calmed me down.

Meanwhile the dinner was drawing to its

close. It did not seem to me that Paris dinners were much livelier than the dinners at Caën. Only Berthe surprised me. My aunt complained of the heat, and every one fell back upon the first topic of conversation; they discussed the spring at-homes, coming to the conclusion that you could not get anything really good to eat except in winter. Then we went to take coffee in the little salon.

Little by little, a great deal of company came. The three drawing-rooms and the dining-room were filled. I had taken refuge in a corner, and as my aunt passed near me, she said hurriedly, —

—— "Don't go, Georges. . . . His wife has come. He has promised to call for her, and I will introduce you."

She still meant M. Neigeon. But I hardly listened to her. I had heard two young men in front of me exchange a few rapid words which made me start. They were standing on tiptoe at the door of the large drawing-room, and at the moment Félix Budin, my old schoolfellow at Caën, came in and made his bow to madame Gaucheraud, the shorter of the two said to the other, —

—— "Is he still with her?"

—— "Yes," answered the taller one. "Oh!

very thick together, quite according to Hoyle. Now it will last till winter. She has never stuck to the same one so long before."

It was no great pang to me; all I felt was a mere wounding of my self-love. Why had she said so tenderly that she adored sweet things? Certainly I did not mean to go in for a rivalry about her with Félix. I at last persuaded myself that those young men must have slandered madame Gaucheraud. I knew my aunt, she was very strict, she could not allow any compromised women at her house. Then I saw Gaucheraud rush headlong at Félix, to shake hands with him; and he gave him some friendly slaps on the back, he watched over him with an almost sentimental expression in his face.

——"Ah! there you are," said Félix when he had found me. "I have only come for your sake. . . . Well! do you want me to pilot you round?"

We both stayed in the doorway. I should have liked to ask him about madame Gaucheraud; but did not know how to do it in an easy, offhand way. While looking for a chance to turn the conversation, I asked him about a host of other people who were completely indifferent to me; and he told me their names, he had some exact information to give about

every one. He, born in Paris, had spent only two years at the lycée in Caën, when his father was prefect of Calvados. It struck me that he had a very free tongue. A smile puckered up his under lip when I asked for details about certain women who were there.

—— "You are looking at madame Neigeon?" he said suddenly.

I was really looking at madame Gaucheraud. I answered, too, sillily enough, —

—— "Madame Neigeon, ah! where, pray?"

—— "That dark woman, over there next the fireplace, talking with a blonde in low neck."

So it was; next madame Gaucheraud, and laughing gayly, was a lady whom I had not noticed.

—— "Ah! that's madame Neigeon," I repeated twice over.

I examined her. It was very annoying that she was dark, for she struck me as quite as charming, a little less tall than Berthe, with a magnificent crown of black hair. Her eyes were at once sparkling and soft. Her small nose, her delicate mouth, her dimpled cheeks, pointed to a temperament at once impetuous and deliberate. Such was my first impression. But, after looking at her longer, my judgment

grew less sure, and I soon saw her to be even more full of fun than her friend, and laughing louder.

——"Do you know Neigeon?" Félix asked.

——"I? not at all. My aunt is to introduce me to him."

——"Oh! a nullity, a perfect ass," he went on. "He is political mediocrity in its fullest bloom; one of those stop-gaps that are so useful under a parliamentary government. As he hasn't two ideas of his own, and all the heads of departments can make use of him, he belongs to the most contradictory combinations."

——"And his wife?" said I.

——"His wife, well! there she is. She is charming. . . . If you want to get anything out of him, be attentive to his wife."

Félix, moreover, affected not to wish to say anything further. But, upon the whole, he gave me to understand that madame Neigeon had made her husband's fortune, and still continued to watch over the prosperity of the household. All Paris credited her with lovers.

——"And the blonde one?" I asked abruptly.

——"The blonde one," answered Félix without changing countenance, "is madame Gaucheraud."

—— "She's all that she should be, is she?"

—— "Why, of course she's all that she should be."

He had begun to look serious, but he could not keep it up; his smile came back again; I even thought I detected in his face a look of fatuousness that irritated me. The two women had doubtless noticed that we were talking about them, for they forced their laughter. I stayed on alone, a lady having carried off Félix; and I passed the evening in comparing them together, wounded and drawn on, not quite seeing into the matter, experiencing the anxiety a man feels who is afraid of committing some stupid blunder in risking a stroke in a society which he does not yet know.

—— "He is a bore, he hasn't come," said my aunt, when she found me in the same corner of the doorway. "It's always like that; besides. . . . After all, it is hardly twelve; his wife is still waiting for him."

I went round through the dining-room, and stationed myself at the other door of the drawing-room. In this way I was behind the ladies. As I came up, I heard Berthe call her friend Louise. Pretty name, Louise. She wore a high-necked dress, the frill of which showed only the white line of her neck under her heavy

coil of hair. This modest bit of white seemed to me for the moment far more provoking than Berthe's wholly bare back. Then I have no opinion, both of them were bewitching, a choice between them seemed impossible in the state of bewilderment I was in.

My aunt, meanwhile, was looking for me everywhere. It was one o'clock.

——"You have changed doors," said she. "Well, he won't come; that Neigeon saves the country every evening. . . . At all events, I will introduce you to his wife before she goes. And mind and be attentive, it is important."

Without waiting for my answer, the countess planted me before madame Neigeon, giving her my name and telling her my business in a single sentence. I stood there awkwardly enough, I could hardly scrape a few words together. Louise waited with her smile; then seeing me stuck fast, she simply bowed. It seemed to me that madame Gaucheraud was making fun of me. Both of them rose and withdrew. In the hall, which had been turned into a cloak-room, they were taken with a fit of wild gayety. This free-and-easy bearing, these tomboy manners, this daring grace, astonished only me. The men made way for them, bowed as they passed by with a mixture of extreme civility and so-

ciety hail-fellow-well-met familiarity that struck me dumb.

Félix had offered me a seat in his carriage, but I stole away, I wished to be alone; and I did not take a fiacre, happy to walk through the silence and solitude of the streets. I felt feverish, as at the approach of some severe illness. Was there a passion growing in me? Like travellers who pay tribute to a new climate, I was about to be tried by the Paris air.

II

I SAW the ladies again this afternoon at the Salon, which, by the way, opened to-day. I confess that I knew I should meet them there; and also that I should be hard put to it now to give an opinion as to the value of the three or four thousand pictures before which I walked up and down for four hours. Félix offered yesterday to call for me about noon; we were to breakfast at a restaurant in the Champs-Elysées, and then go to the Salon.

I have thought a good deal since my evening at the countess's, but I admit that it has not brought about any great clearness in my ideas. What a strange world this Paris society is! so polished, and, at the same time, so spoiled! I am no straitlaced moralist, but I am none the less troubled at the thought of the prodigious things I have heard among men in corners of my aunt's drawing-room. To believe the crude sayings exchanged in an undertone, more than half the women there were no better than they should be; and beneath the urbanity of conver-

sation and manners there was a brutality of judgment that stripped them all bare, mothers and daughters, bespattering the most honest as well as the most compromised. How was one to get at the truth, amidst these shady stories, these assertions of Tom, Dick, or Harry, deciding upon a woman's virtue or immodesty? At first I thought that my aunt, in spite of what my father had said of her, received some pretty nasty people. But Félix told me it was the same in almost all Paris drawing-rooms; even strict hostesses had to show themselves tolerant, under penalty of having their houses deserted. My first repugnance had calmed off, and nothing was left but the sensual craving after my own share of these easy pleasures, of these delights offered with so perturbing a grace.

For the last four days I have not been able to wake up in the morning, in my little apartment in the rue Laffitte, without thinking of Louise and Berthe, as I call them familiarly. Little by little this has brought about a singular phenomenon, ending with my confounding one of them with the other. This morning I felt sure that Félix was really Berthe's lover; but this did not wound me; quite the reverse; I saw an encouragement in it, a certainty of making myself loved. I associated the two

together in my mind: as they had yielded to others, why should they not yield to me? This has been the continual theme of a delicious revery, about my time for getting up. I would dawdle on in bed, luxuriating in the warmth of the bedclothes, a happy laziness in all my limbs. And I have avoided giving anything a distinct outline, for I would find it pleasant to remain in uncertainty concerning the issue, which I always kept contriving to suit myself. I could thus refine upon the circumstances that should some day surrender Berthe or Louise to me, I did not care to know exactly which one. At last I got up with a thorough conviction that I had but to choose, to be master of either.

When we went into the first room at the Exhibition of paintings, I was surprised at the enormous crowd stifling there.

——"The devil!" whispered Félix, "we are a little late. We shall have to make play with our elbows."

It was a very mixed crowd: artists, bourgeois, people in society. In the midst of ill-brushed overcoats and dark frock coats, you saw those spring toilets that are so bright in Paris, with their light-colored silks and vivid trimming. And I was delighted, above all, at the quiet assurance of the women, cutting their way

through the densest crowds, with no anxiety about their trains, their waves of lace always passing through at last. They would go thus from one picture to another, at the gait at which they would cross their own drawing-room. It takes a Parisian to preserve that goddess-like serenity amid throngs of all sorts of people, as if words she hears, the personal contacts to which she submits, could not rise to her level and soil her. For a moment I followed with my eyes a lady who Félix told me was the duchesse d'A***; she was with her two daughters, of from about sixteen to eighteen; and all three looked at a Leda without wincing, while behind them a studioful of young painters were making fun of the picture in very free terms.

Félix turned into the rooms on the left, a suite of large square halls where the crowd was less compact. A white light fell from the glazed ceilings, a crude glare sifted through shades of cotton cloth; but the dust raised by the feet of the people there hovered like rarefied smoke above the sea of heads. The women had to be very pretty to stand this light, this uniform tone, against which the pictures on the four walls stood out in garish spots. There was a strange medley of colors,—reds, yellows, blues,

—that jarred with one another; a perfect rainbow orgy amid the flashing gold of the frames. It began to be very hot. Baldheaded gentlemen, their skulls turning paler, walked about puffing, hat in hand. All the visitors stood with up-turned noses. There was a crush before certain canvases. There were currents, pushings, the helter-skelter of a human flock let loose across a palace. And, without intermission, you heard the continuous roll of feet upon the floor, accompanying the dull and prolonged hubbub of this throng like the roar of the sea.

—— "Hullo!" said Félix, "there's the big thing that's so much talked about."

Five rows of people were gazing at the big thing. There were women with opera-glasses, artists chatting mischievously in whispers, a tall, lean gentleman taking notes; but I hardly looked at anything. I had just espied, in a neighboring room, two ladies resting their elbows upon the rail in front of the line, examining a little picture with great curiosity. At first it was but a flash of lightning: beneath the capes of their bonnets I had seen some thick black tresses and a tousled fuzz of fair hair; then the vision vanished, a wave of the billowing crowd of heads had drowned the two ladies; but I could have sworn it was they. After a few

steps I again caught sight, between the incessantly moving heads, now of the fair hair, now of the black tresses. I said nothing to Félix; I only led the way into the next room, manœuvring so that he should seem to recognize the ladies first. Had he seen them as well as I? I am inclined to think so, for he cast a keen, quizzical side-glance at me.

——"Ah! what a lucky meeting!" cried he, bowing.

The ladies turned round and smiled. I had been waiting for the shock of this second interview. It was decisive. Madame Neigeon bowled me over with a single glance of her black eyes, whereas I seemed to find a friend once more in madame Gaucheraud. This time it was the thunder-stroke. She wore a little yellow bonnet covered with a sprig of glycine, and her dress was of mauve silk, trimmed with straw-colored satin,—a toilet at once very showy and very soft in tone. But I only thought of these details afterwards; for, at first sight, she appeared as in a blaze of sunshine, as if she irradiated light round about her.

Meanwhile Félix chatted.

——"Nothing good, is there?" said he. "I've seen nothing yet."

——"Oh!" protested Berthe, "it is like every year."

Then, turning toward the line,—

——"Do look at this little picture Louise has discovered. The dress is perfection! Madame de Rochetaille wore one just like it at the last Élysée ball."

——"Yes," murmured Louise; "only the ruching came down in a square over the front breadth."

They studied the little canvas again, which showed a lady in a boudoir, standing in front of a fireplace and reading a letter. The painting struck me as very second-rate, but I felt myself full of a certain friendliness for the painter.

——"But where is he?" asked Berthe abruptly, looking around her. "He keeps losing us every ten steps."

She was speaking of her husband.

——"Gaucheraud is over there," quietly answered Félix, who saw everybody. "He is looking at that big frosting Christ, nailed to a gingerbread cross."

As he said, her husband was making the tour of the rooms by himself, looking placidly uninterested, with his hands behind his back. When he saw us, he came up to shake hands, and said in his cheery way,—

——"Have you noticed? Over there is a Christ full of really remarkable religious feeling."

The ladies strolled on again. We followed them with Gaucheraud. The husband's presence authorized us to accompany them. We spoke of M. Neigeon: he would doubtless come, if he got away in time from his commission, where he was to announce the opinion of the government on a very important question. Gaucheraud had pounced upon me and overwhelmed me with friendliness. Félix smiled, nudging me gently with his elbow; but I could not understand. He availed himself of my taking up the big man's attention to walk on ahead with the ladies. I caught shreds of their conversation.

——"Then, you are going to the Variétés this evening?"

——"Yes, I have taken a baignoire. They say the play is queer. . . . I'll take you, Louise. Oh! I am in earnest!"

And farther on,—

——"Here we have come to the end of the season. This opening of the Salon is the last Parisian solemnity."

——"You forget the races."

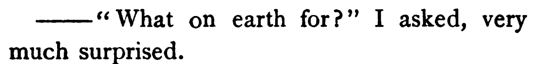
——"So I do! I have a mind to go to the

races at Maisons-Laffitte. I've been told it is very nice there."

All this time Gaucheraud was talking to me about le Boquet, a superb piece of property, he said, the value of which my father had doubled. I felt him to be full of flattery. But I scarcely listened to him, stirred up, as I was, from the very depths of my being, every time Louise brushed against me with her long train, as she stopped suddenly before a picture. Her white neck, under her black hair, was delicate as a baby's. For the rest, she still had her boyish bearing, which annoyed me a little. She was much bowed to, and she laughed, she entertained people with her outbursts of high spirits and the dainty swing of her skirts. Two or three times she turned round and looked at me fixedly. I walked on in a dream. I could not tell how many hours I thus followed her, half stunned by Gaucheraud's gabble, blinded by the miles of paintings that stretched out to the right and left. I can only remember that, towards the end, we chewed dust in the rooms and that I was horribly tired, whereas the women held out well, smiling to the end.

At six, Félix took me off to dine. At dessert, —

—— "I thank you," said he all of a sudden.



——"What on earth for?" I asked, very much surprised.

——"Why, for your delicacy in not making love to madame Gaucheraud. So you prefer the dark ones?"

I could not help blushing. He hastened to add,—

——"I don't want any of your confidences. On the contrary, you must have noticed that I did not try to put in my oar. I believe that a man must work out his own apprenticeship in life for himself."

He was no longer laughing, he was serious and friendly.

——"Then, you think she might love me?" said I, without daring to mention Louise by name.

——"I!" he replied, "I know nothing at all about it. Do as you please. You will see well enough what turn matters take."

I looked upon this as an encouragement. Félix resumed his sarcastic tone; and lightly, as a bit of banter, told me that he should not be surprised if Gaucheraud would like to see me fall in love with his wife.

——"Oh! you don't know the old boy, you didn't understand why he threw himself so hard at your head. His uncle's influence is going

down in your arrondissement, and if he should have to show himself before his constituents, he would be glad enough to be able to count on your father. . . . The deuce! I was afraid, you understand; for you can be of service to him, whereas he has now worn me threadbare."

"But it's abominable!" I cried out.

——"Why abominable?" said he, with so calm a countenance that I could not make out if he were fooling. "When a woman has to have friends, it's just as well for those friends to be of use to the household."

As we got up from table, Félix spoke of going to the Variétés. I had seen the play two days before; but I told a fib, I expressed a lively desire to see it. And what a delightful evening! The ladies happened to be in a baignoire near our stalls. By turning my head, I could follow on her face Louise's enjoyment of the actors' jokes. I had found these jokes imbecile, two days before. Now they no longer sickened me; on the contrary, I enjoyed their flavor, because they seemed to establish a sort of contraband complicity between Louise and me. The play was very much off color, and she laughed especially at the equivocal hits. It was enough that she was in a baignoire; that made it a permis-

sible dissipation. When our eyes met in the midst of a fit of laughter, she did not drop hers. I never saw more exquisite perverseness. I said to myself that three hours passed in this fashion ought to advance my interests considerably. Then, the whole house was having a good time; many women in the balcony did not even hold their fans up to their faces.

Between the acts, we went to make our bow to the ladies. Gaucheraud had just gone, we could sit down. The baignoire was dark, I felt Louise next me. A movement of hers spread out her skirts, and they covered my knees. I carried away with me the sensation of this rustling contact as a first silent avowal that bound us together.

III

Ten days have passed by. Félix has disappeared; I can find no pretext for bringing myself nearer to madame Neigeon. To have at least something to do with her, I am reduced to buying five or six big newspapers in which I read her husband's name. He has taken part in a serious debate, and has made a speech which is much talked about. At another time this speech would have bored me; now it interests me; I see Louise's black tresses and white neck behind its wire-drawn sentences. I have even had a violent discussion, with a gentleman whom I hardly know, about M. Neigeon, for whose incapacity I stand up. The malicious attacks in the papers make me beside myself. No doubt, the man is a fool; but this proves all the more surely his wife's cleverness, if she is, as they say she is, the good fairy of his fortune.

In the course of these ten days of impatience and fruitless going about, I have been five or six times to my aunt's, always hoping for a

lucky chance, for some unforeseen meeting. By the way, I displeased the countess so tremendously, at my last call, that I shall not dare to return very soon. She had taken it into her head to get me a diplomatic appointment through M. Neigeon's influence; and her astonishment was great when I declined it, alleging my political opinions as an excuse. The worst of it was that I had accepted, at first, when I was not in love with Louise, and had as yet no repugnance to owing her husband a good turn; and my aunt, who could not comprehend my sudden attack of delicacy, was dumfounded at what she called a boy's whim. Do not legitimists, quite as scrupulous as I, represent the republic abroad? On the contrary, diplomacy is the asylum for legitimists; they fill our embassies, they do the good cause useful service by keeping for themselves the high places the republicans long for. I was much at a loss for sound reasons to give in reply. I intrenched myself behind a ridiculous rigorism; and my aunt at last called me a fool, all the more in a rage that she had already spoken about the matter to M. Neigeon. Never mind! Louise shall not think I pay my court to her to obtain a post from the ministry.

I should be laughed at were I to tell through what strange feelings I have passed during the last ten days. First I was sure Louise had noticed the profound agitation into which the rustling of her skirt over my knees had thrown me; and I argued from this that I was not disagreeable to her, since she had not drawn back at once. I saw in this something like a sensual advance on her part that passed the bounds of permissible coquetry. These are sincere jottings, a sort of confession in which I conceal nothing. Many men, if they were to tell all, would own that surroundings and associations may change, but that woman is ever the same. In love woman bestows herself, or allows herself to be taken. I am speaking of married women, of women in society, who have appearances to keep up. Men who desire them see quickly enough when they offer themselves, beneath the good manners of breeding and the sophistication of luxury. All this is to say that, in my lover's egotism, I found a possible liaison between Louise and myself quite natural. That bit of skirt over my knee was simply a piece of charming frankness and jaunty audacity.

Only, some hours later, I began to doubt. I reasoned in the opposite way. Only a girl

of the streets could offer herself so. I was an ass to think that a woman was throwing herself at my head, even in a fit of giddiness. Madame Neigeon was not thinking of me. She might have lovers, but her liaisons must surely be better planned and more complicated. There must be a long distance between the woman of my dreams, the wholly instinctive woman, going straight to her pleasures, and the adroit woman, the Parisian, full of hidden subterfuges, which she doubtless was.

Then I would fail to make her out at all. She faded from my mental vision. I even no longer knew if it were really true that I had sat five minutes in the shade of a box at the theatre, feeling her alive and touching me. And I was very unhappy; so much so that I thought of going back and shutting myself up at le Boquet.

Day before yesterday an idea struck me that I am surprised at not having had at first. It was to go to a session of the Chambre; perhaps M. Neigeon would speak; perhaps his wife would be there. But it was down in the book of fate that I should not see that devil of a man yet. He was to have spoken, but did not even put in an appearance; they said he was detained by I know not what commission of

the Senate. To make up for it, I had a thrill on seeing madame Gaucheraud in the front row of the gallery opposite me. Alas! Louise was not with her. My joy fell. Going out, I managed to meet madame Gaucheraud in a lobby. She greeted me familiarly. Félix has certainly spoken to her about me.

——"Have you been away from Paris?" she asked me.

I was struck dumb, exasperated by this question,—I who had tramped so furiously all over the city!

——"I ask because no one sees you anywhere. The last reception at the minister's was superb, and there has been a wonderful horse show. . . ."

Then, as I still looked the picture of despair, she began to laugh.

——"Well, au revoir to-morrow"; she went on, turning away to leave me, "we shall see you out there, shall we not?"

I stupidly answered yes, for fear of making her laugh again. She turned round, and gave me a sly glance.

——"Do come," she said once more, almost in a whisper, confidentially, like a friend who had some happy surprise in store for me.

I was seized with a mad desire to run after

her, to question her; but she had turned into another lobby. I raved at my silly vanity that had prevented my confessing my ignorance. Of course, I was ready to go out there; but where was out there? The vagueness of this appointment put my mind to the torture; and I felt ashamed into the bargain at not knowing what society knew. In the evening, I ran to Félix's, meaning to get it out of him in some adroit way. Félix was out. Then, disconsolate, I plunged into the newspapers, selecting the most fashionable and the most read, trying to divine, from amid the announcements for the morrow, what the place was where fashion would have it that people should meet. My perplexity grew apace; there were all sorts of solemnities, — an exhibition of old masters, a charity fair in a great club-house, a mass with music at Sainte-Clotilde, a last dress rehearsal, two concerts, and a taking the veil, not counting races, pretty much everywhere. How could a fresh arrival, a provincial conscious of his own greenness, unravel such a tangle? I understood perfectly well that supreme fashion demanded that I should go to one of these places; but, good God! to which one? At last, at the risk of wasting a whole day, and being devoured with impatience if I guessed wrong, I

mustered courage to choose. I seemed to remember hearing the ladies speak of the races at Maisons-Laffitte, and an inspiration came to me; I resolved to go to the races at Maisons-Laffitte. This resolution taken, I felt calmer.

What an enchanting bit of country these suburbs of Paris are! I did not know Maisons-Laffitte, and it delighted me with its bright houses, built on a hillside, along the banks of the Seine. We are in the first days of May; the apple-trees, all white, make huge nosegays amid the light green of the poplars and elms.

Yet I found at first that I had pretty well lost my bearings, astray as I was between walls and live hedgerows, unwilling to ask my way of any one. I had had the satisfaction of seeing no end of people take the same train; but the ladies were not there, and, as I scanned the passers-by, my heart began to fail me. I lost my way outside the village, along the Seine, near a clump of brambles. Fifty paces off, coming toward me, a group of people were advancing slowly; and I recognized Louise and Berthe. Gaucheraud and Félix, still inseparable, followed a few steps in the rear. So I had guessed right. This filled me with pride; but such was my embarrassment that I was guilty of a veritable piece of childishness. I

hid behind the clump of brambles, overcome with I know not what shamefacedness, afraid of appearing ridiculous. When Louise passed by, the hem of her dress brushed against the bush. I saw at once the folly of my first impulse. I accordingly hastened to cut across the fields; and when, in their walk, they got to a sharp turn in the road, I came out upon them in the most natural way in the world, like a man who thinks himself alone, and is indulging in revery in the open air.

—— "Hullo! it's you!" cried Gaucheraud.

I bowed, affecting a lively surprise. They all exclaimed, we exchanged hand-shakes. But Félix laughed in his peculiar way, while Berthe looked me in the eye with a slight drooping of the lids that established a complicity between us. We resumed our walk; I found myself some seconds behind the rest with her.

—— "So you did come?" said she gayly, in an undertone.

And, without giving me time to answer, she fell to bantering me, adding that I was very fortunate in still being so much of a child. I felt her to be an ally; it seemed to me that she would take a personal delight in throwing her friend into my arms. Then Félix turned round to ask,—

——"What on earth are you laughing at?"

——"Monsieur de Vaugelade is telling me about a journey he once took with a whole family of English," she answered coolly.

Gaucheraud had taken Félix's arm again and dragged him off, as if not to disturb my tête-à-tête with his wife. I stayed behind, alone, between Louise and Berthe; I passed a delicious hour on that shady road, following the course of the Seine. Louise had on a dress of light-colored silk, and her sunshade, lined with pink, bathed her face in a delicate, warm light, without a shadow. The country made her still more unconventional, talking loud, looking me in the face, following Berthe's lead, as she led her on to daring topics of conversation with a persistency that struck me afterwards.

——"Do give madame Neigeon your arm," the latter said at last. "You are not gallant, you must see that she is tired."

I offered my arm to Louise, who immediately leant upon it. Berthe rejoined her husband and Félix, leaving me alone, over forty paces behind. The road led up the hillside, and we walked very slowly. Below us flowed the Seine, between broad fields, spread out like green velvet carpets. There was a long, narrow island, intersected by two bridges, over which trains passed with a rolling like distant thunder.

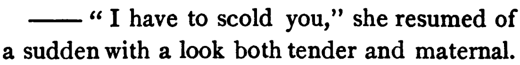
Then, across the water, an immense plain, plots of tilled land stretched out as far as mont Valérien, the gray buildings on which we could see at the sky's edge, in a dust of sunshine. And, above all, what moved me to tears was the odor of spring that encompassed us, rising from the grass and weeds on both sides of the road.

—— "Do you go back to le Boquet soon?" asked Louise.

I was ass enough to answer no, not foreseeing that she was going to add, —

—— "Ah! that's too bad; we leave here next week for les Mureaux, my husband's place, about five miles from yours, I believe, and he meant to ask you to come and see us."

I stammered, I said my father might perhaps recall me sooner than I expected. It seemed to me that her arm pressed harder upon mine. Was she, then, making an appointment with me? Upon the light estimate I had formed of this Parisian, so free and so sophisticated, I immediately built up a romance, a liaison offered me in the country, a month of love beneath great trees. Yes, that was it; she undoubtedly found in me the graces of a country gentleman, and wished to love me over there, in my right setting.



—— "I have to scold you," she resumed of a sudden with a look both tender and maternal.

—— "How so?" I muttered.

—— "Yes, your aunt has spoken to me about you. It seems that you will accept nothing at our hands. We might take offence at that, who knows? Tell me, why do you refuse?"

I blushed for the second time. I was on the point of hazarding my declaration, of crying out, "I refuse because I love you." But she made a movement with her hand as if she understood and wished to silence me. Then she added, laughing, —

—— "If you are proud, and are bent upon rendering service for service, we are very willing to accept your protection over there. You know there is a councillor general to be elected. My husband is running for the office, but he is afraid of being beaten, which would be very unpleasant in his situation. . . . Will you help us?"

No one could be more charming. I took this story of an election to be a clever woman's pretext to bring us together again in the fields.

—— "Why, of course I will help you!" I answered, in high spirits.

—— "And, if you get my husband elected, it is understood that he, in his turn, shall give you a push?"

—— "It's a bargain."

—— "Yes, a bargain."

She held out her little hand to me, and I gave it a good shake. We were joking, both of us. In very truth it seemed enchanting. The trees were behind us by this time, the sun cast its rays straight down upon the brow of the hill, and we were walking through the intense heat in silence. But that idiot of a Gaucheraud came up to disturb this thrilling stillness beneath the flaming sky. He had heard us speaking of the council general, he would not let me go, telling me a story about his uncle, manœuvring to get me to introduce him to my father. At last we reached the race-course. They thought the races magnificent. I, standing behind Louise all the while, looked at her exquisite neck. And what a delightful time we had on the way back, through a sudden shower! The green of the country turned lighter still under the rain, the leaves and earth smelt good, with an odor of love. Louise half closed her eyes, tired and as if carried away by the voluptuousness of the spring.

—— "Remember our bargain," she said to me at the station, while getting into her carriage that was awaiting her. "You will be at les Mureaux in a fortnight, won't you?"

I squeezed the hand she held out to me; rather too hard, I fear, for I saw her look grave for the first time, with two lines of displeasure about the lips. But Berthe seemed still to encourage me to dare more, and Félix kept up his enigmatic smile, while Gaucheraud slapped me on the back, crying out, —

—— "At les Mureaux in a fortnight, monsieur de Vaugelade. . . . We shall all be there."

Devil take him!

IV

I AM just back from les Mureaux, and my mind is so full of contradictory thoughts that I feel I must rehearse over to myself the day I have spent in Louise's company, to try to form a definite opinion.

Although les Mureaux is only five miles from le Boquet, I was not familiar with that part of the country. Our shooting grounds lie towards Gommerville, and, as you have to go a longish way round to cross the little stream of le Béage, I had not been there ten times in my life. Yet the hillside is delicious, with its road rising up the slope, bordered with great walnut-trees. Then, once on the top of the hill, you go down on the other side, and les Mureaux is at the entrance of a little vale, the sloping sides of which soon draw together into a narrow gorge. The house, a square building of the seventeenth century, is rather insignificant; but the park is superb, with its broad lawns and the bit of wood at the farther end, so thickly grown that even the paths themselves are invaded by branches.

When I arrived on horseback, two big dogs came bounding about me, barking out their welcome. At the end of the avenue, I at once saw a spot of white. It was Louise, in a light-colored dress and straw hat. She did not come down to meet me, but stayed motionless and smiling at the head of the broad flight of steps that leads to the vestibule. It was nine at most.

——"Ah! how delightful of you!" she called out to me. "You, at least, are an early riser! . . . As you see, I am the only one up in the château as yet."

I complimented her upon her fine Parisian energy. But she added, laughing, —

——"It is true that I have only been here five days. I can rise with the chickens the first few mornings. . . . Only, after the first week, I begin gradually to fall back into my lazy habits, and end by coming down at ten, as I do in Paris. . . . But this morning I am still a country lass."

I had never seen her so enchanting. In her hurry to leave her room, she had knotted her hair carelessly together, thrown about her the first wrapper that came to hand, and, all fresh, her eyes moist with sleep, she was like a child again. Little locks fluttered over her neck.

I could see her arms, bare to the elbow, as her wide sleeves blew open.

—— "You don't know where I was going?" she went on. "Well, I was going to see a trellis of morning glories in the arbor over there; they say it is wonderful before the sun has closed the blossoms. It was the gardener told me that; and, as I missed my morning glories yesterday, I don't want to lose them to-day. . . . You will come, too, won't you?"

I was burning to offer her my arm, but I saw that it would be ridiculous. She ran like a truant schoolgirl. At the arbor she gave a scream of admiration. A whole drapery of morning glories hung from above, a shower of little bells beaded over with dew, their delicate tints running from bright pink to pale blue and violet. It was like one of those fancies in Japanese albums, strangely graceful and dainty.

—— "This is the reward for getting up early," said Louise gayly.

Then she sat down in the arbor, and I allowed myself to take the place on the bench beside her, seeing her draw aside her skirt to make room for me. I was very much excited, for it came into my head to hurry on matters, to take her round the waist and kiss her on the neck. I felt, to be sure, that this would be

quite on a par with the brutality of a sub-lieutenant storming the virtue of a chambermaid. But I could think of no other way, and this idea possessed me; it turned to a sort of physical need. I do not know whether Louise understood what was going on within me; she did not rise; she only put on her serious look.

——"First of all, let us talk of our business; shall we?" said she.

I had a buzzing in my ears; I forced myself to listen to her. It was dark and a little cold in the arbor. The sun pierced through the morning glories in thin streaks of gold; and on Louise's white wrapper it was as if golden flies, golden insects, were alighting there.

——"How far have we got?" she asked, with the air of an accomplice.

Then I told her of the strange veering about I had noticed in my father. He, who for ten years had declaimed against the new order of things, forbidding me ever to serve the republic, had given me to understand on the evening of my arrival that a fellow of my age owed himself to his country. I suspected my aunt of this conversion. Some woman must have been let loose upon him. Louise smiled while listening to me. At last she said, —

——"I met monsieur de Vaugelade three days ago at a neighboring château where I was calling. . . . We had some talk."

Then she added quickly, —

——"You know that this election to the council general comes off on Sunday. You will take the field at once. . . . With your father on our side, my husband's success is assured."

——"Monsieur Neigeon is here?" I asked after a brief hesitation.

——"Yes, he came down last evening. . . . But you will not see him this morning, for he has gone towards Gommerville, to breakfast with a friend of his, a landowner, who has great influence."

And she rose; I kept my seat for a moment longer, decidedly sorry that I had not kissed her on the neck. Never again shall I find so dark a little nook at that early morning hour, when she would be just out of bed, hardly dressed. Now it was too late; and I felt so sure I should make her laugh, if I fell at her feet on the damp ground, that I put off my declaration to a more favorable moment.

Besides, I had just caught sight of Gaucheraud's heavy outline at the end of the path. Seeing Louise and me come out of the grove,

he gave a little sardonic grin. Then he flew into ecstasies over our heroism in getting up so early. He was just down.

——"And Berthe?" Louise asked him, "has she had a good night?"

——"Faith, I don't know," he answered. "I haven't seen her yet."

And, seeing my astonishment, he explained that his wife had a sick headache for the whole day, if any one came into her room in the morning. They had two rooms; it was more convenient; especially in the country. He ended by saying quietly, without a smile,—

——"My wife dotes on sleeping alone."

We were crossing the terrace that overlooks the park, and I could not help thinking of the racy stories told about château life. I took pleasure in calling up a vision of a secluded nook for elegant debauchery; lovers stealing barefoot along passages, without a candle, going to rejoin their ladies in chambers, of which the doors had been left ajar. These were fitting pastimes for perverse Parisians, prompt to turn the freedom of the country to account, giving a last fillip to liaisons on the verge of breaking off. And all of a sudden, I felt convinced that my dream was a reality, on seeing Berthe and my friend Félix come out of the vestibule, both

of them listless, as if broken down with fatigue, in spite of their full night's sleep.

—— "You are not unwell?" Louise kindly asked of her friend.

—— "Thanks, no. Only, you know, the change makes one all nerves. . . . And then, at daybreak there were some birds that made such a noise!"

I shook hands with Félix; and I don't know why, at the smile the two women exchanged, while Gaucheraud whistled with round shoulders and still affable, it came into my mind that Louise was ignorant of nothing that went on under her roof. She must have heard men's footsteps along the passages at night, those doors opened and shut with cunning stealth, that breath of love issuing from dark alcoves and wafted along the walls. Ah! why had I not kissed her on the neck in the arbor! I was already calculating by what loophole I could enter when I came at night to go up to her room. At the left of the vestibule there was a low window, which struck me as capital.

We had breakfast at eleven. After breakfast Gaucheraud went off for a nap. He had unbosomed himself to me, telling me in confidence that he was afraid he should not be returned at the coming elections, and adding that he meant

to stay three weeks in the arrondissement, to get votes. After going to his uncle's, he had wished to spend a few days at les Mureaux, so as to show the whole country that he was on the best of footings with the Neigeons; this, he thought, ought to bring him in votes. I saw that he longed to be invited to my father's also. The unlucky part of it was that I seemed not to care for blonde women.

I passed a very bright afternoon with the ladies and Félix. This château life, these Parisian graces sporting in the open air in the first summer sunshine, are really enchanting. The drawing-room is extended and continued out upon the lawn; no longer the winter drawing-room where you are penned up at close quarters, where women in low neck make play with their fans amid black dress coats standing along the walls; but a drawing-room in vacation, with women running free along the paths in light dresses, men in sack coats daring to show themselves good fellows, a giving up of society etiquette, a familiarity that precludes the boredom of ready-made conversation. I must confess, nevertheless, that the ladies' manners continued to surprise me, me who had grown up in the provinces among straitlaced, church-going women. As we were taking our coffee on the

terrace after breakfast, Louise went to the length of a cigarette. Berthe talked slang, as to the manner born. Later, both disappeared with a great rustling of skirts, laughing from afar, calling out to each other, with a giddiness that disturbed me. It is silly to own up to, but these ways of theirs, new as they were to me, gave me hopes of an assignation with Louise for no distant night. Félix placidly smoked cigars. I caught him, every now and then, looking at me with his bantering smile.

At half after four I spoke of going. Louise cried out at once, —

—— "No, no; you don't go. You must stay to dinner. . . . My husband is sure to be back. At last you will see him. I really must introduce you."

I explained to her that my father expected me. There was a dinner at le Boquet at which I had to be present. I added, laughing, —

—— "It is an electors' dinner; I am going to work for you."

—— "Oh! then, go quickly. . . . And, you know, if you succeed, come and get your reward."

It seemed to me that she blushed in saying this. Did she merely mean the diplomatic post my father is urging me to accept? . I thought I

could detect another, more tender meaning her words; no doubt, I looked so insupportably fatuous that I saw her turn serious for the second time, with that fold of the lips that gives the face an expression of displeasure.

For the rest, I did not have time to reflect upon this abrupt change of countenance. As I was going, a light carriage drove up to the steps. I supposed it was the husband, already come back; but there were only two children in the carriage, a little girl of about five and a little boy of four, accompanied by a chambermaid. They stretched out their arms and laughed, and, as soon as they could jump to the ground, ran and threw themselves upon Louise's skirts. She kissed them on the hair.

—— "Whose are these beautiful children?" I asked.

—— "Why, they're mine!" she answered with a look of surprise.

Hers! I cannot express the shock this simple speech gave me. It seemed as if, suddenly, she were escaping me, as if those little beings, with their feeble hands, were digging an impassable trench between her and me. What! she had children, and I knew nothing of it! I could not keep back this blunt exclamation,—

—— "You have children!"

—— "Undoubtedly," said she quietly. "They went this morning to see their godmother, five miles from here. . . . Allow me to introduce them: monsieur Lucien, mademoiselle Marguerite."

The little things smiled at me. I must have looked stupid. No, I could not get used to the thought of her being a mother. That turned all my ideas topsy-turvy. I came away with my head buzzing; and even now I do not know what to think. I see Louise in the arbor of morning glories, and I see her kissing Marguerite's and Lucien's hair. Decidedly, these Parisians are too complex for a provincial of my ilk. I must sleep on it. To-morrow I will try to understand.

V

HERE is the catastrophe of the adventure. Oh! what a lesson! But let us try to tell things calmly.

On Sunday M. Neigeon was elected councillor general. When the votes were counted, it was evident that the candidate would have come to grief without our support. My father, who had seen M. Neigeon for himself, gave me to understand that so absolutely commonplace a man was not to be feared; besides, the radical candidate had to be beaten. In the evening after dinner, the old man awoke once more in my father, and he contented himself with saying to me,—

—— "All this is not very clean. But they all kept telling me that I was working for you. . . . After all, do your duty. All that remains for me is to quit this business, for I no longer understand a thing about it."

Monday and Tuesday I hesitated about going to les Mureaux. It seemed to me that it would be almost brutal to go for my thanks so soon

For the matter of that, I had got over seeing any obstacle in the children. I had reasoned with myself, proving to my own satisfaction that Louise was as little of a mother as possible. Did not people in my province say that mothers in Paris never sacrificed their pleasures to their children, and that they turned them over to servants, to be free themselves? Yesterday, Wednesday, all my scruples vanished. Impatience devoured me. I set out on the war-path at eight.

My plan was to get to les Mureaux, as I did the first time, in the morning and find Louise alone, just out of bed. But, when I dismounted, a servant told me that madame had not left her room yet, neither did he offer to go and tell her of my arrival. I said I would wait.

And I did wait two good hours. I don't know how many times I walked round the flower beds. From time to time I raised my eyes to the first-story windows; but the blinds remained hermetically sealed. Tired out and unstrung by this protracted walk, I at last went and sat down in the arbor of morning glories. The morning was cloudy; no sunbeams glided between the leaves like gold-dust. It was almost dark beneath the foliage. I thought

the matter over, saying to myself that I must stake all for all. My conviction was that, if I hesitated again, Louise would never be for me. I encouraged myself, I called up before my mind all that had led me to think her yielding and of easy conquest. My plan was simple, and I was maturing it: as soon as I found myself alone with her, I would take hold of her hands, I would pretend to be embarrassed, so as not to scare her too much at first, then I would kiss her on the neck, and the rest would come of itself. For the tenth time I was perfecting my scheme, when, all of a sudden, Louise appeared.

—— "Where in the world are you hiding?" she said gayly, looking for me in the dark. "Ah! there you are! I have been running after you for ten minutes. . . . I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting."

I replied, with something of a lump in my throat, that there was no tediousness in waiting while one was thinking of her.

—— "I forewarned you," she went on, without seeming to pause at this piece of insipidity, "I am a country lass only for the first week. Now you see I am a Parisian again; I cannot get out of my bed."

She had stopped at the threshold of the

arbor, as if not caring to venture into the darkness beneath the leaves.

—— "Well! aren't you coming!" she asked after a while. "We have something to talk over."

—— "But we are very comfortable here," I said, my voice trembling. "We can talk on this bench."

She again hesitated for a second. Then, bravely, —

—— "As you please. Only it is so dark! It is true, words have no color."

And she sat down beside me. I felt ready to faint. So the time had come! Another minute, and I would take hold of her hands. Yet, still quite at her ease, she continued speaking in her clear voice, untinged with the slightest emotion, —

—— "I don't thank you in ready-made phrases. You have given us a good lift, without which we should have been left on the field. . . ."

I was past interrupting her. I trembled, I egged myself on to daring.

—— "Besides, between you and me these words are needless," she resumed. "You know we have struck a bargain. . . ."

As she said that, she laughed. That laugh

made up my mind at once. I grasped her hands, and she did not withdraw them. They felt very small and very warm in mine. She let them go amicably, familiarly, while she repeated, —

—— "Yes, is it not so? It is my turn now to do my part."

Then I, like a brute, dared to use force, to draw her hands toward me and put them to my lips. The darkness had deepened; a cloud must have been passing over our heads; the strong odor of the plants intoxicated me, in that nook of foliage. But, before my lips could touch her neck, she tore herself loose with a nervous strength I should not have suspected in her, and, in her turn, caught me roughly by the wrists. Now, she held me, without anger, her voice still calm, yet with a touch of rebuke in it.

—— "Come, no childish tricks," she said. "This is what I feared. Will you allow me to read you a lesson, while I hold you fast here in this little corner?" She spoke with the smiling severity of a mother reproving a small boy.

—— "From the first day I have understood perfectly. You have been told horrors about me, have you not? . . . You have hoped for things, and

I can make allowances and forgive you, for you know nothing of our world; you dropped down into Paris with the ideas people have in this howling wilderness. . . . Then again, you say to yourself that it is to some extent my fault, if you have made a mistake. I ought to have stopped you; you would have withdrawn at a word from me. It is true, I did not speak that word, I let you go on; you must look upon me as an abominable coquette. . . . Do you know why I did not say that word?"

I stammered out something. The astonishment of the scene paralyzed me. She squeezed my wrists tighter, she shook me, speaking so close to me that I felt her breath upon my face.

—— "I did not say it because you interested me, and I wished to give you this lesson. . . . You don't understand yet; but you will think it over and make it out. We are much slandered. Perhaps we do all that is needful for that. Only, you see, there are some of us who are honest, even amongst those who seem giddiest and most compromised. . . . All this is very intricate. I repeat that you will think it over and understand."

—— "Let me go," I mumbled in confusion.

—— "No, I shall not let you go. . . . Ask my pardon, if you wish me to let you go."

And in spite of her half-bantering tone, I felt that she was more and more annoyed, that tears of anger were rising to her eyes under the affront I had put upon her. A feeling of esteem, of true respect for this woman, so fascinating and so strong, grew up within me. Her Amazonian grace in virtuously bearing with her husband's imbecility, the mixture in her of coquetry and strict uprightness, her contempt for injurious tittle-tattle, and the man's part she played in her household, hidden under the giddiness of her conduct, showed her as a very complex figure, that filled me with admiration.

—— "Forgive me!" I said humbly.

She let me go. I got up at once, while she stayed quietly on the bench, no longer fearing anything from the darkness, nor from the perturbing scent of the foliage. She resumed her gay tone, saying, —

—— "Now I return to our bargain. As I am very honest, I pay my debts. . . . See, here is your appointment as secretary of legation. I received it last evening."

And, seeing me hesitate to take the envelope she held out to me,

—— "Why," she cried, with a dash of sarcasm, "it seems to me that you can

now well afford to be under an obligation to my husband."

Such was the catastrophe of my first adventure. When we came out of the arbor, Félix was on the terrace with Gaucheraud and Berthe. He drew his lips together on seeing me come with my appointment in my hand. No doubt he was acquainted with the whole business, and was making fun of me. I took him aside to reproach him bitterly for having allowed me to commit such a blunder; but he answered that experience alone forms artless youth; and, when I pointed to Berthe, who was walking before us, asking him about her, too, he gave a shrug of the shoulders the meaning of which was very clear. Matters being thus, I confess that, in spite of all, I do not yet quite understand the strange ethics of a society in which the most honest women often show a singular complaisance.

What gave me the final stroke was to learn from Gaucheraud himself that my father had invited them, him and his wife, to come and spend three days at le Boquet. Félix fell to smiling again, announcing that he was to go back to Paris the next day.

Then I took my leave, giving as a pretext that I had formally promised my father to be

back by breakfast-time. I had got to the end of the avenue when I saw a gentleman in a cabriolet. It must have been M. Neigeon. Faith! I am glad I have missed him once more. On Sunday, Gaucheraud and his wife come to take up their quarters at le Boquet. What a nuisance!

NANTAS

NANTAS

I

THE room where Nantas lived after coming from Marseilles was at the top of a house in the rue de Lille, next door to the hôtel of the baron Danvilliers, a member of the council of State. This house belonged to the baron, who had built it on land formerly occupied by old outhouses. By leaning out of the window, Nantas could catch a glimpse of a corner of the hôtel garden where some superb trees cast their shade. Beyond, over the tree-tops, you got a view of Paris and could see the gap left by the Seine, the Tuileries, the Louvre, the line of quays, a whole sea of roofs, way out to Père-Lachaise in the dim distance.

It was a small attic room, with sloping ceiling and a dormer-window cut in the slate roof. Nantas had furnished it simply with a bed, a table, and a chair. He had gone there from the station, with an eye to cheapness, having made up his mind to camp out anywhere till he had found a situation of some sort. He did not mind the soiled paper, the blackened ceil-

ing, nor the bare wretchedness of this closet with no fireplace in it. When he went to bed opposite the Louvre and Tuileries, he would liken himself to a general, lodging at some wretched roadside inn before the immense, rich city he meant to storm next day.

Nantas's story was a short one. The son of a Marseilles mason, he began his studies at the lycée in that city, urged on thereto by his mother's ambitious affection; her dream was to make a gentleman of him. His parents bled themselves to bring him on as far as his baccalaureate. Then his mother died, and Nantas had to accept a small situation with a tradesman, in which for twelve years he dragged out a life the monotony of which exasperated him. He would have run away twenty times over, had not his duty as a son kept him in Marseilles, to be near his father who had fallen from a scaffolding and lost the use of his limbs. Now he had the whole household on his hands. But, coming home one evening, he found the mason dead, with his pipe still warm beside him. Three days afterwards he sold what there was in the house and set out for Paris with two hundred francs in his pocket.

Nantas inherited from his mother a stubborn ambition to make a fortune. He was a fellow

of prompt decision and cool strength of will. When still quite young he used to say he was a force. He was often laughed at when he so far forgot himself as to be confidential and repeat his favorite expression, "I am a force"; a phrase which sounded oddly when you saw him in his thin frock coat, split out at the shoulders with sleeves not coming down to his wrists. Thus he gradually developed a religious adoration for strength; he could see nothing else in the world, and was convinced that the strong are victorious in spite of all. He said it was enough to have the will and the power. The rest did not matter.

When he walked out alone of a Sunday through the parched suburbs of Marseilles, he felt that he had genius; there was a sort of instinctive impulse in the depths of his being which pushed him forward; and he would come home to his plateful of potatoes with his infirm father, saying to himself that he would some day find a way to carve out his share in that society in which he was still nothing at thirty. It was no base desire, no appetite for vulgar pleasures; it was the very distinct feeling of an intellect and will which, not being in their right place, meant to rise quietly to that place in obedience to a natural logical instinct.

When first he set foot upon the Paris pavement, Nantas fancied he had but to stretch out his hands to find a situation worthy of himself. He set out on the warpath that very day. He had been given some letters of recommendation, and delivered them in person; he also knocked at the doors of some people from his part of the country, in the hope of securing their aid; but by the end of a month he had obtained no results: it was the wrong time, people said; besides, some made promises which they failed to keep. Meanwhile his little purse was growing empty, he had only twenty francs left at most; and on these twenty francs he had to live a whole month longer, eating nothing but bread, beating the town from morning till evening, and coming home to bed without a light, fagged out, and still with empty hands. He was not discouraged; only a dumb wrath was rising within him. Fate seemed illogical and unjust.

One evening Nantas came home without having eaten anything. He had finished his last piece of bread the day before. No money left, and not a friend to lend him twenty sous. It had been raining all day, one of those gray Paris rains that are so cold. Nantas was soaked through to the skin; he had been to Bercy,

then to Montmartre, where he had been told employment was to be had; but the Bercy place was taken, and at Montmartre his handwriting was found to be unsatisfactory. These were his last two hopes. He would have accepted anything, no matter what, sure of carving out his fortune in the first situation that might come to hand. All he asked was bread to begin with, something to live on in Paris, any ground you please, whereon to build afterwards, stone by stone. He walked slowly from Montmartre back to the rue de Lille with a heart drowned in bitterness. It had stopped raining, and a busy crowd elbowed him on the sidewalk. He stopped for a few moments in front of a money-changer's window: five francs would perhaps have enabled him to become the master of all those people some day; you can live a week on five francs, and in a week much can be done. As he was in this brown study a carriage splashed him, and he had to wipe the mud from his forehead; it felt like a slap in the face. Then he walked on faster, grinding his teeth, with a ferocious longing to fall with clenched fists upon the crowd that blocked his way through the streets: he could have revenged himself so upon the stupidity of Fate. An omnibus nearly ran over him in the rue

Richelieu. He cast a jealous glance at the Tuileries from the middle of the place du Carrousel. On the pont des Saints-Pères he had to turn out for a well-dressed little girl, leaving the straight path he was following with the obstinacy of a wild boar tracked by a pack of hounds; and this having to turn aside was like a supreme humiliation to him: the very children would not let him pass! When, at last, he had taken refuge in his room, like a wounded beast come home to die in its den, he threw himself heavily upon his chair, tired out, looking at the mud stiffening on his trousers and the pool on the floor that had run out from his shoes, all down at heel.

This time it was surely the end. Nantas wondered how he would kill himself. His pride was still erect, and he fancied that his suicide would punish Paris. To be a force, to feel yourself full of power, and not find a living soul to guess it and give you the first dollar you so sorely need! This seemed a monstrous insult, and his whole being rose up in wrath. Then he felt a boundless regret when his glance fell upon his useless arms. Yet no task scared him; he would have uplifted a world with the tip of his little finger; and here he was, cast back into his corner, reduced to impotency, devour-

ing himself like a caged lion. But he soon grew calmer, death seemed nobler still. When a little boy, he had been told the story of an inventor who, after building a wonderful machine, broke it one day with his hammer in face of the indifference of the crowd. Very well! he was that man; he brought in himself a new force to market, a rare mechanism of intellect and will, and he would destroy that machine by smashing his head on the street pavement.

The sun was setting behind the trees of the hôtel Danvilliers, an autumn sun whose golden rays lit up the yellow leaves. Nantas arose as if drawn on by this farewell of the sun. He was going to die, and wanted light. He leaned out of the window for an instant. Between the masses of foliage, at the turn of the path, he had often caught sight of a fair-haired young girl, very tall, walking there with princely haughtiness. He was not romantically disposed, and was well past the age at which young men dream in their attics of young ladies in society coming to bring them great passions and great fortunes. Yet it happened that at this supreme hour of suicide he suddenly remembered that beautiful fair-haired girl who was so supercilious. What could her name be? But at the same moment he clenched his fists,

for he felt nothing but hatred toward the people in that hôtel through whose windows ajar he caught glimpses of a severe luxury, and he muttered in his rage, —

—— "Oh! I'd sell myself, I'd sell myself, if I could be given the first hundred sous of my fortune to come!"

He thought over this notion of selling himself, for a moment. If there had been a pawnbroker anywhere to lend him money on energy and force of will, he would have gone to him and pawned himself. In his fancy he saw imaginary bargains: a politician had come to buy him, to make a tool of him; a banker was hiring him, to turn his intelligence to account at any moment; and he accepted, having a disdain for honor, saying that it was enough to be strong and to triumph some day. Then he smiled. Can a man find a market for himself? The rascals who lie in ambush for opportunities of that sort starve to death before putting their finger upon a buyer. He was afraid of turning coward, telling himself that these were mere put-offs that he was inventing; and he sat down again, swearing he would throw himself out of the window as soon as it was dark.

But he was so tired that he fell asleep in his chair. He was suddenly waked up by the sound

of voices. His concierge was showing a lady into his room.

—— "Sir," she began, "I have taken the liberty of showing up . . ."

And, seeing there was no light in the room, she hurried down again for a candle. She seemed to know the person she had brought, her manner was at once obliging and respectful.

—— "There," she went on as she withdrew, "nobody will disturb you."

Nantas, who had waked up with a start, looked at the lady in surprise. She had raised her veil. She was about forty-five, short, very fat, with the white doll-face of an old dévote. He had never seen her before. When he offered her his only chair, she answered the question in his eye by giving her name, —

—— "Mademoiselle Chuin. . . . I have come, Sir, on a matter of importance."

He seated himself upon the edge of his bed, there being no other place. Mademoiselle Chuin's name told him nothing. He made up his mind to wait for her to be so kind as to explain herself. But she was in no hurry; she glanced round the little room and seemed to hesitate about how she should open the conversation. At last she spoke, in a very soft voice, underscoring the delicate points with a smile, —

——"Sir, I come as your friend. . . . I have been told the most affecting things about you. Certainly, you must not think me a spy. There is nothing in all this but a lively desire to be of use to you. I know how hard life has been for you hitherto, with what courage you have struggled to get a situation, and what is now the disheartening result of so many efforts. . . . Forgive me once more, Sir, for thus prying into your life. I swear to you that sympathy alone . . ."

Nantas did not interrupt her, full of curiosity though he was; he thought his concierge must have furnished all these details. Mademoiselle Chuin might go on; and yet she was more and more anxious to put things in a complimentary and caressing way.

——"You are a young man with a great future before you, Sir. I have taken the liberty to watch your endeavors, and have been much struck with your praiseworthy firmness in misfortune. In a word, it seems to me that you would go far if some one were to hold out a helping hand to you."

She stopped again, waiting for a word from him. The young man thought this lady had come to offer him a situation. He replied that he would accept anything. But now that the ice was broken, she asked him squarely, —

——"Should you have any objection to marrying?"

——"To marrying!" cried Nantas. "Why, good God! who would have me, madam? . . . Some poor girl, whom I couldn't even support."

——"No, a very handsome, very rich, and magnificently related young girl, who will, all at once, place in your hands the means of rising to the very highest position."

Nantas stopped laughing.

——"What is your bargain, then?" he asked, instinctively lowering his voice.

——"This young girl is in the family way, and the child must be acknowledged," said mademoiselle Chuin distinctly, forgetting her unctuous phrases in the heat of business.

Nantas's first impulse was to throw the go-between out of doors.

——"This proposal of yours is infamous," he muttered.

——"Oh! infamous," cried mademoiselle Chuin, once more in her honeyed voice, "I won't accept the nasty word. . . . The truth of it is, Sir, that you will save a family from despair. Her father knows nothing of it, the pregnancy is not far advanced yet; and it was my idea to marry the poor girl off as soon as possible, and present her husband as the child's

father. I know her father; it would kill him. My plan would deaden the shock, he would think it a reparation. . . . The unfortunate part of it is that the real seducer is married. Ah! Sir, there are some men who really have no moral sense. . . ."

She might have gone on long in the same vein. Nantas had stopped listening to her. But why should he refuse? Had he not, just now, wanted to sell himself? Well, some one had come to buy him. It was give and take. He was to give his name, and they were to give him a situation. It was a contract like another. He looked at his trousers, dirty with the Paris mud, and felt that he had not eaten since the day before; all his rage at his two months of seeking and humiliation rose up in his heart. At last! so he was to set his foot upon that crowd who had repulsed him and driven him to suicide!

—— "I accept," he said bluntly.

Then he got mademoiselle Chuin clearly to explain the matter. What did she want for her part in the business? She protested, she wanted nothing. Still she ended by asking twenty thousand francs on the sum to be settled on the young man. And as he did not haggle about it, she became communicative.

—— "Listen, I'm the one who thought of you. The young girl didn't say no when I mentioned you. . . . Oh! it's a good bargain, you'll thank me some day. I might have found a man of rank, I know of one who would have kissed my hands; but I thought it best to choose some one from outside this poor child's circle. It will seem more romantic. . . . Then, I like you. You're a nice fellow, you've got a head on your shoulders. Oh! you'll go far. I'm entirely at your service, don't forget it."

So far no name had been mentioned. On Nantas's question the old maid got up and said, introducing herself anew, —

—— "Mademoiselle Chuin. . . . I've been at baron Danvilliers's as governess ever since the baroness died. It is I who have brought up mademoiselle Flavie, the baron's daughter. . . . Mademoiselle Flavie is the young person in question."

And she withdrew, after discreetly depositing on the table an envelope containing a five-hundred-franc note. It was an advance made by herself, to meet first expenses. When he was alone, Nantas went to the window. The night was very dark; all that could be distinguished was the mass of trees by the deepening of the shade where they stood; light

gleamed from a window in the dark front of the hôtel. So it was that tall fair-haired girl, who walked along with her queenly gait, and did not deign to notice him. She or another, what mattered it, after all! The woman was no item in the bargain. Then Nantas raised his eyes and looked out upon Paris growling in the gloom, upon the quays, the streets, the crossings on the left bank of the river, lit up with dancing gas jets; and he tutoyéed Paris, he grew familiar and spoke in a tone of superior authority, —

——"Now, thou art mine!"



II

Baron Danvilliers was in the drawing-room which he used as a study, a severe, high-studded room hung in leather, with antique furniture. For two days he had been like one thunder-struck by the story told him by mademoiselle Chuin of Flavie's disgrace. It was of no use for her to trace back the facts and tone them down; the old man had fallen beneath the blow, and only the thought that her seducer could make one last reparation still sustained him. That morning he was awaiting the visit of this man, whom he did not know, and who was thus taking his daughter from him. He rang.

——"Joseph, a young man is coming, and you will show him in here. . . . I am not at home to any one else."

And he thought it over bitterly, alone by his fireside. The son of a mason, a pauper who had no avowable position! To be sure, mademoiselle Chuin spoke of him as a promising young fellow, but what a disgrace to a family that had been hitherto without stain! Flavie

had taken the whole blame upon herself in a sort of passionate outburst of remorse, to spare her governess the slightest reproach. Since this painful explanation she had kept her room, the baron having refused to see her again. Before forgiving her, he wished to settle this abominable business himself. His plans were all made; but his hair had turned from gray to white, and his head had a senile tremor.

—— "Monsieur Nantas," Joseph announced.

The baron did not rise. He only turned his head and looked fixedly at Nantas as the latter came toward him. Nantas had been shrewd enough not to give in to the temptation to put on new clothes; he had bought a frock coat and black trousers, still pretty clean, but very threadbare; and these gave him the appearance of a poor, tidy student, with no touch of the adventurer. He stopped in the middle of the room and waited there standing, yet without humility.

—— "So it's you, Sir," stammered out the old man.

But he could not go on, his emotion choked him; he was afraid of giving way to some violent impulse. After a silence he said simply, —

—— "Sir, you have done a bad action."

And as Nantas was about to defend himself, he repeated with more force, —

——"A bad action. . . . I wish to know nothing about it, I beg you not to try to explain the matter to me. If my daughter had thrown herself at your head, your crime would still be the same. . . . Only thieves introduce themselves into families with such violence."

Nantas once more bowed his head.

——"A dowry easily won, and a trap sure to catch both daughter and father. . . ."

——"Allow me, Sir," the young man interrupted, beginning to rebel.

But the baron made a terrible gesture.

——"What? what do you wish me to allow you? . . . It is not for you to speak here. I am telling you what I must tell you, and what you must hear, since you come to me as a culprit. . . . You have outraged me. See this house; for over three centuries our family has lived here without a stain; do you not feel that there is ancient honor here, a tradition of dignity and respect? Well! Sir, you have struck all this a blow in the face. I have nearly died of it, and my hands tremble to-day as if I had suddenly grown ten years older. . . . Do not speak a word, but listen to me."

Nantas turned very pale. He had undertaken a right hard part here. Still he tried to urge the blindness of passion as an excuse.

—— "I lost my head," he muttered, trying to make up a story. "I could not see mademoiselle Flavie . . ."

At his daughter's name the baron sprang up and cried out in a voice of thunder, —

—— "Stop! I have told you that I wish to know nothing. Whether my daughter sought you out, or you came to her, does not interest me. I have asked her nothing, and I ask you nothing. Keep both of your confessions to yourselves; that is a slough into which I shall not dip."

He sat down again, trembling with exhaustion. Nantas assented, deeply moved in spite of his self-command. After a silence the old man went on in the dry voice of one who is going through with a matter of business, —

—— "I beg your pardon, Sir, I had promised myself to keep cool. It is not you who are in my power, but I who am in yours, seeing that you have me at your mercy. You are here to propose a transaction which has become necessary. Let us have it over, Sir."

And from that moment he affected to speak like a lawyer who might be amicably arranging some disgraceful suit, such as a man touches upon only with disgust. He said slowly, —

—— "Mademoiselle Flavie de Danvilliers

inherited at her mother's death the sum of two hundred thousand francs, which was not to be paid over to her until the day of her marriage. This sum has already borne interest. For the matter of that, here are my accounts as her guardian; I wish to go over them with you."

He opened a file of papers and read out the figures. Nantas tried in vain to stop him. He now began to feel the business keenly, face to face with this so straightforward and simple old man, who seemed very noble to him indeed, now that he was calm.

—— "And lastly," the latter went on, to conclude, "I make over to you, by the contract drawn up by my lawyer this morning, the sum of two hundred thousand francs. I know you have nothing. These two hundred thousand francs will be paid you by my banker on the day after the marriage."

—— "But, Sir," said Nantas, "I don't ask you for your money; I only want your daughter. . . ."

The baron cut him short.

—— "You have not the right to refuse, and my daughter must not marry a man of smaller means than herself. . . . I give you the dowry I intended for her, that is all. Perhaps you counted on getting more, but people think me richer than I really am, Sir."

And as the young man was dumb under this last piece of cruelty, the baron closed the interview by ringing for the servant.

——"Joseph, tell mademoiselle that I wish her to come to my study at once."

He rose and did not speak another word as he walked slowly up and down the room. Nantas stood there motionless. He was deceiving this old man, and felt himself belittled and powerless in his presence. At last Flavie came.

——"My daughter," said the baron, "here is this man. The marriage will take place when the legal time has expired."

And he went away, leaving them together, as if the marriage were concluded, as far as he was concerned. When the door shut there was a dead silence. Nantas and Flavie looked at each other. They had not met before. He thought her very handsome, with her pale, haughty face in which her two large gray eyes never drooped. She might have been weeping, the three days during which she had not left her room; but the coldness of those cheeks must have frozen the tears. She spoke first.

——"Then, Sir, this business is settled?"

——"Yes, madam," Nantas answered simply.

She gave an involuntary pout, looking at him

long and steadily, as if trying to spy out the baseness in him.

——"Well, so much the better," she went on. "I was afraid I should find nobody for such a bargain."

Nantas felt in her voice all the scorn she was heaping upon him. But he raised his head. If he had trembled before the father, knowing that he was deceiving him, he meant to face it out stoutly and squarely to the daughter, who was his accomplice.

——"I beg your pardon, madam," he said quietly, with great politeness, "I think you misinterpret the situation which brings both of us to what you very rightly called a bargain. I intend that, from this day forward, we shall place ourselves on a footing of equality. . . ."

——"Oh! really," Flavie interrupted him with a scornful smile.

——"Yes, on a footing of complete equality. . . . You want a name, to hide a fault which I do not permit myself to judge, and I give you mine. I, on my side, want capital and a certain social position, to carry through some weighty enterprises, and you bring me this capital. We are henceforth two partners whose investments balance; we have only to thank each other for services mutually rendered."

She had stopped smiling. A wrinkle of irritated pride made a bar across her forehead. Still she did not reply to him. After a silence she resumed, —

—— "You know my conditions?"

—— "No, madam," said Nantas, who kept perfectly calm. "Be so good as to dictate them to me, and I will subscribe to them beforehand."

Then she spoke plainly, without a hesitation or a blush, —

—— "You will never be anything but my husband in name. Our lives will remain entirely distinct and apart. You will give up all your rights over me, and I shall have no duty toward you."

At each sentence Nantas accepted with a nod. That was just what he wanted. He added, —

—— "If I thought it my part to be gallant, I should tell you that such hard conditions fill me with despair; but we are above such flat compliments. I am glad to see that you have the courage to look our respective situations in the face. We are entering upon life by a path along which there are no flowers to pluck. . . . I only ask one thing of you, madam, and that is not to take advantage of the freedom I grant you in a way to call for my interference."

——"Sir!" said Flavie violently, for her pride was touched to the quick.

But he bowed respectfully, begging her not to be offended. Their position was a delicate one; they must both tolerate certain allusions, without which no good understanding would be possible. He did not press the matter further. Mademoiselle Chuin, in a second interview, had told him the story of Flavie's fall. Her seducer was a certain M. des Fondettes, husband of one of her convent friends. While passing a month at his country house, she had found herself in this man's arms one evening, without exactly knowing how it could have happened, nor how far she herself had been a consenting party. Mademoiselle Chuin spoke of it almost as rape.

Suddenly Nantas turned to her amicably. Like all men who are conscious of their strength, he liked to be genial.

——"See, madam," he cried, "we don't know each other; but it would really be wrong for us to hate each other thus at first sight. Perhaps we were made to understand one another. . . . I see very well that you despise me; that's because you don't know my history."

And he spoke feverishly, passionately, as he told her of his life in Marseilles, eaten up with

ambition, and of his rage at his two months of futile effort in Paris. Then he showed her his contempt for what he called social conventions, in which the common run of men flounder up to the neck. What mattered the opinion of the crowd, when you set your foot upon them? A man should be above all that. Omnipotence excused everything. And he painted in broad outlines the life he meant to lead. He no longer feared any obstacle; nothing should prevail against his strength. He would be strong, he would be happy.

—— "Do not think me meanly interested," he added. "I'm not selling myself for your fortune. I take your money only as a means of rising very high. . . . Oh! if you knew all that is boiling within me; if you knew the burning nights I have spent in dreaming the same dream over and over again, a dream always swept away by the next day's reality, you would, perhaps, be proud to lean on my arm, knowing that you at last furnished me the means of being somebody!"

She stood erect, listening to him, not a feature of her face moved. He, meanwhile, kept asking himself one question which he had been turning over in his mind for three days without being able to answer it, — had she noticed him

at his window, to have accepted mademoiselle Chuin's proposal so readily when she mentioned him? The singular notion occurred to him that she might perhaps have fallen romantically in love with him, had he indignantly refused the bargain proposed by her governess.

He stopped speaking, and Flavie was still cold as ice. Then, as if he had made no confession to her, she repeated dryly, —

—— "So, my husband only in name; our lives to be completely sundered and absolutely free."

He at once resumed his ceremonious manner and curt voice, like one discussing a contract.

—— "It is signed, madam."

And he withdrew, dissatisfied with himself. How could he have given in to the stupid desire to convince that woman? She was very beautiful; it would be better that there should be nothing in common between them, for she might hamper him in life.

III

Ten years passed by. One morning Nantas was in the study where baron Danvilliers had received him so harshly at their first interview. Now this study was his; after being reconciled to his daughter and son-in-law, the baron had given up the hôtel to them, only keeping for his own use a pavilion at the other end of the garden, on the rue de Beaune. In ten years Nantas had conquered one of the highest financial and industrial positions. With a hand in all the great railway enterprises, taking part in all the real-estate speculations that marked the first years of the empire, he had rapidly realized an enormous fortune. But his ambition did not stop there; he meant to play a part in politics, and had succeeded in getting himself elected deputy from a department where he owned several farms. As soon as he was in the Corps législatif, he began to pose as a future minister of finance. His special knowledge of the subject and his ease in speaking brought him day by day into a more

and more prominent position. For matter of that, he made a clever show of absolute devotion to the empire, though he had his own peculiar theories on questions of finance, — theories which made a good deal of noise in the world and were, he knew, much pondered over by the emperor.

That morning Nantas was overrun with business. A prodigious activity reigned in the offices he had set up on the ground floor of the hôtel. There was a whole world of employees, some motionless behind their gratings, others continually coming and going, keeping the doors on the swing; there was a continuous ring of gold, open bags running over upon the tables, the never silent music of a strong-box whose waves seemed as if they would flood the streets. Then a busy crowd thronged the anteroom: solicitors, business men, politicians, all Paris on its knees before omnipotence. Personages of high distinction would often wait there patiently for an hour. And he, seated at his desk, in correspondence with the provinces and foreign powers, able to embrace the world in his outstretched arms, had at last realized his old dream of strength and felt himself the intellectual motor of a colossal machine which moved kingdoms and empires.

Nantas rang for the usher who guarded his door. He seemed anxious.

—— "Germain," he asked, "do you know if madame has come home?"

And, as the usher answered that he did not, he ordered him to call madame's maid; but Germain did not go.

——"I beg pardon, Sir," he mumbled, "the president of the Corps législatif is here and insists upon coming in."

He gave an annoyed start and said,—

——"Well, then! show him in and do as I have told you."

On the day before, a speech by Nantas on a question of capital importance relating to the budget had produced such an impression that the article under discussion had been returned to the committee, to be amended as he advised. It was noised abroad after the session that the minister of finance would resign, and the young deputy was already pointed out in certain circles as his successor. He shrugged his shoulders: nothing was settled, he had had only one interview with the emperor, to talk over some special points. Nevertheless the visit of the president of the Corps législatif might be big with meaning. He seemed to throw off the preoccupation that darkened his

brow, and rose to shake hands with the president.

——"Ah! monsieur le duc," he said, "I beg your pardon. I did not know you were there. . . . Believe me, I am much touched with the honor you do me."

They talked of this, that, and the other for a moment, in a cordial vein. Then the president, though without committing himself to anything definite, gave him to understand that he had been sent by the emperor, to probe him. Would he accept the portfolio of finance, and with what program? Then he, with superb coolness, made his stipulations. But beneath the impassiveness of his face a larum of triumph began to sound in his heart. At length he was climbing the last rung, he was at the top. One step more, and he would have all heads below him. As the president was concluding, saying that he would go to the emperor that very instant, to communicate the debated program to him, a little door leading to the apartments opened and madame's maid appeared.

Nantas suddenly turned pale again and did not finish the sentence he had begun. He ran to the woman, muttering,—

——"Excuse me, monsieur le duc. . . ."

And he questioned the woman in whispers: So madame went out early? Did she say where she was going? When was she coming home? The maid answered evasively, like an intelligent girl who does not mean to commit herself. He saw the greenness of his questions, and said simply, —

—— "As soon as madame returns, tell her I wish to speak with her."

The duke had gone to the window in surprise, and was looking out into the courtyard. Nantas came back and made some excuses. But his coolness was gone, he stammered, astonishing the other with some rather clumsy speeches.

—— "There! I've made a mess of it," he said aloud when the president had gone. "That portfolio will slip through my fingers."

And he continued uneasy, with now and then a fit of anger. Several people were shown in. An engineer had a report to submit to him which promised enormous profits from the working of a mine. A diplomatist spoke of a loan which a neighboring power wanted to open in Paris. Dependants of his own passed in and out, giving accounts of a dozen important matters. Finally he received a large deputation of his colleagues of the Chambre; they

were brimming over with exaggerated praise of his speech the day before. He had but to take up a pen, to send off despatches the receipt of which would have rejoiced the markets of Europe or filled them with consternation; he could prevent or precipitate a war by supporting or opposing the loan which had been spoken of; he even held the budget of France in his hand, he would soon know whether he was for or against the empire. It was triumph; his own personality, immeasurably developed, was on the eve of becoming the centre round which a whole world revolved. And he did not enjoy this triumph, as he had promised himself he would. He felt weary, with his mind elsewhere, shuddering at the slightest noise. When a feverish flush of satisfied ambition rose to his cheeks, he felt himself suddenly turn pale, as if a cold hand had touched him from behind on the nape of the neck.

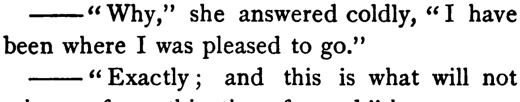
Two hours passed by and Flavie had still not come. Nantas called Germain, to tell him to go and ask M. Danvilliers to come to him, if the baron was at home. When he was left alone he walked up and down his study and refused to receive any more visits that day. Little by little his agitation increased. It was clear that his wife had gone to some rendez-

vous. She must have renewed her acquaintance with M. des Fondettes, now six months a widower. Certainly Nantas did not admit to himself that he was jealous; for ten years he had strictly kept the stipulated contract; only, as he said, he would not stand being made ridiculous. Never would he allow his wife to compromise his position by making him a laughing stock for all men. And his strength deserted him; this feeling of a husband who simply wishes to be respected filled him with an anxiety the like of which he had never felt before, not even when playing his most daring game in the early days of his fortune.

Flavie came home; she was still in her street dress and had only taken off her bonnet and gloves when Nantas, in a trembling voice, told her that he would have come up to her room if she had let him know she had got home. But she, without sitting down, and like a client who is in a hurry, motioned him to be quick.

——"Madam," he began, "an explanation has become necessary between us. . . . Where have you been this morning?"

Her husband's shivering voice and the downright directness of this question surprised her extremely.



——"Why," she answered coldly, "I have been where I was pleased to go."

——"Exactly; and this is what will not suit me from this time forward," he went on, turning very pale. "You must remember what I have told you, I will not tolerate your using the freedom I allow you in a way to dishonor my name."

Flavie gave a smile of sovereign contempt.

——"Dishonor your name, Sir? Why, that is your affair; that is something which no longer remains to be done."

Then Nantas, mad with rage, rushed at her as if he would beat her, stammering out,—

——"Wretched woman, you have just come from monsieur des Fondettes's arms. . . . You have a lover, I know it."

——"You mistake," she said without drawing back at his threat, "I have never seen monsieur des Fondettes again. . . . But if I had a lover, you could not reproach me with it. What can it matter to you? You seem to forget our agreement."

He looked at her for an instant with haggard eyes; then, sobbing convulsively and throwing all his passion into one cry, he sank down at her feet.

——"Oh! Flavie, I love you!"

She, still erect, drew back, for he had touched the hem of her dress. But the unhappy man crawled after her, dragging himself on his knees with outstretched hands.

—— "I love you, Flavie, I love you like a madman. . . . I don't know how it came about. It was years ago. And little by little it has taken complete possession of me. Oh! I have struggled against it, I thought this passion unworthy of me, I remembered our first meeting. . . . But now I am too wretched, I must speak to you. . . ."

He went on long. It was the melting away of all his beliefs. This man who had put his faith in strength, who maintained that will was the only lever to raise the world, had fallen annihilated, weak as a child, disarmed by a woman. And his realized dream of fortune, the position he had won, he would have given all to have this woman raise him up with a kiss on the forehead. She spoilt his triumph for him. He no longer heard the gold ringing in his offices, no longer thought of the coming and going of bowing courtiers, he forgot that, perhaps at that very moment, the emperor was calling him to power. These things did not exist. He had all, and he wanted only Flavie. If Flavie refused, he would have nothing.

—— "Listen," he went on, "what I have done I have done for your sake. . . . At first, to be sure, you did not count; I worked for the satisfaction of my own pride. Then you became the sole aim of all my thoughts, of all my efforts. I said to myself that I must rise as high as possible, to deserve you. I hoped to soften you when I should place my power at your feet. See where I am to-day. Have I not won your forgiveness? Do not despise me, I conjure you!"

She had not spoken yet. She said very quietly, —

—— "Rise, Sir; some one might come."

He would not rise, he still implored her. Perhaps he might have waited, had he not been jealous of M. des Fondettes. This torture drove him mad. Then he said very humbly, —

—— "I see plainly that you still despise me. Well! wait; give your love to no one. I promise you such great things that I shall surely find a way to soften you. You must forgive my brutality just now. I lost my head. . . . Oh! let me hope that you will love me some day!"

—— "Never!" she said energetically.

And as he was still on his knees, as if crushed to earth, she turned to leave the room.

But he lost all self-control and sprang up in a fit of rage, seizing her by the wrists. Should a woman brave him thus, when the whole world was at his feet? He was all-powerful, could overturn states, drive France whither he would; and could he not win a woman's love! He, so strong, so powerful, whose slightest wishes were commands, had only one wish left; and should this wish never be granted because a creature, weak as a child, denied him! He squeezed her arms, repeating in a strident voice, —

—— "I will. . . . I will. . . ."

—— "And I will not," said Flavie, all rigid in her strength of purpose.

The struggle continued, when baron Danvilliers opened the door. At sight of him Nantas let Flavie go and cried out, —

—— "Sir, your daughter has just come from her lover's. . . . Please to tell her that a woman should respect her husband's name, even when she does not love him, and the thought of her own honor has ceased to be a restraint."

The baron was greatly aged; he stood still on the threshold, looking upon this scene of violence. It was a grievous surprise to him. He thought the couple on mutually good terms,

and approved the ceremonious relations between husband and wife, taking them for signs of nothing more than the formal behavior before the world befitting their station. He and his son-in-law belonged to two different generations; but, though his sense of honor might be wounded by the somewhat unscrupulous activity of the financier and he might condemn certain enterprises which he characterized as breakneck, he had to recognize his force of will and quick intelligence; and now he had suddenly fallen into the midst of this unsuspected drama.

When Nantas charged Flavie with having a lover, the baron, who still treated his daughter with the same severity as when she was ten years old, came forward with his solemn, senile step.

——"I swear to you that she has just come from her lover's," Nantas repeated, "and you see how she stands there and faces me down."

Flavie contemptuously turned her head. She was arranging her cuffs, which her husband's roughness had crumpled. Not a blush had risen to her face. But her father was speaking to her.

——"My daughter, why do you not defend yourself? Can your husband have spoken the

truth? Can you have kept this last sorrow for my old age? . . . . The affront would be for me, too; for the fault of one member of a family sullies all the others."

Then she gave a start of impatience. Her father chose his time well for accusing her! She endured his questions a moment longer, wishing to spare him the shame of an explanation; but as he in his turn grew angry at seeing her so provokingly dumb, she said at last, —

—— "Humph! father; let the man play out his part. . . . You do not know him. Do not force me to speak, out of respect for you."

—— "He is your husband," the old man replied. "He is the father of your child."

Flavie raised her head, trembling with anger.

—— "No, no, he is not the father of my child. . . . At last I will tell you all. This man is not even a seducer, for it would at least have been an excuse if he had loved me. This man has simply sold himself and consented to cover up the crime of another."

The baron turned to Nantas, who started back, pale as death.

—— "Do you hear, father!" Flavie went on still more violently, "he has sold himself, sold himself for money. . . . I never loved

him, he has never touched me with the tip of his finger. . . . I wanted to spare you a great grief, I bought him to lie to you. . . . Look at him, see if I speak the truth or not."

Nantas hid his face in his hands.

——"And now," the young woman continued,—"now he wants me to love him. . . . He has thrown himself upon his knees and wept. Some comedy, doubtless. Forgive me for deceiving you, father; but really, do I belong to this man? . . . Now that you know all, take me away. He used violence to me just now, I shall not stay here a minute longer."

The baron straightened up his bent figure. He silently gave his daughter his arm. The two crossed the room without Nantas's making a gesture to stop them. At the door the old man simply said,—

——"Good by, Sir."

The door closed behind them. Nantas was left alone, crushed, gazing wildly into the void around him. As Germain had just come in and left a letter on his desk, he opened it and glanced through it mechanically. This letter, written entirely in the emperor's own hand, called him in very obliging terms to the ministry of finance. He hardly understood it. The realization of all his ambitions no longer af-

fected him. The ring of gold grew louder in the neighboring offices; it was the time of day when the house of Nantas was at its busiest, setting a whole world of people in a hubbub. And he, in the midst of this colossal labor, which was his own work, at the apogee of his power, with his eyes stupidly fixed upon the emperor's writing, uttered this childish cry, the negation of his whole life, —

—— "I am not happy. . . . I am not happy. . . ."

His head fell upon his desk, and his hot tears blotted out the letter that appointed him minister.

IV

NANTAS had been minister of finance eighteen months; all this while he seemed to be stupefying himself with a superhuman amount of work. On the day following the scene of violence in his study, he had an interview with baron Danvilliers; and Flavie consented, on her father's advice, to return to live with her husband. But the couple did not speak a word to each other, outside the comedy they had to play before the world. Nantas decided not to leave his hôtel. He brought his secretaries home with him in the evening, and got through with his business there.

It was the period of his life in which he did the greatest things. A voice prompted him with lofty and fertile inspirations. When he passed by in the street, a murmur of good will and admiration arose around him. But he remained insensible to praise. He seemed to be working without hope of reward, trying to heap labor upon labor, with the sole intent of attempting the impossible. Every time he rose

a step higher, he would consult Flavie's face. Was she touched at last? Had she forgiven his old infamy, to see nothing but the development of his intellect? And he never surprised an emotion on that woman's mute face, but would return to his work saying, "Come! I am not high enough for her yet; I must rise still higher, and still keep rising." He meant to force happiness as he had forced fortune. All his belief in strength had returned, he would admit no other lever in this world, for it is the will to live that makes mankind. When discouragement came at times, he would lock himself up in his room, so that no one should suspect the weakness of his flesh. His struggles were to be guessed only from his deeper sunken eyes, ringed with black and burning with a fierce flame.

Now jealousy devoured him. His not succeeding in making Flavie love him was a torment; but he grew mad with rage at the thought that she might give herself to another. She might even make herself conspicuous with M. des Fondettes, just to proclaim her freedom. So he pretended not to think about her, though suffering tortures at her slightest absences. Had he not feared ridicule, he would have followed her himself in the streets. It

was then that he thought of having some one with her, whose devotion to himself he would buy.

Mademoiselle Chuin had been kept in the house. The baron was used to her. On the other hand, she knew too much to be discharged. The old maid thought at one time of retiring on the twenty thousand francs Nantas had paid her, the day after his marriage; but she doubtless reflected that the house was a good place to fish in troubled waters. She waited for a fresh opportunity, calculating that she needed twenty thousand francs more, to buy the notary's house at Roinville, where she was born, which had been the admiration of her younger days.

Nantas did not need to mince matters with this old maid, whose face could not deceive him, with all its assumed devoutness. Nevertheless, the morning when he sent for her to his study and proposed to her, fairly and squarely, to keep the run of his wife's slightest doings, she pretended to be scandalized, and asked him whom he took her for.

—— "Come, mademoiselle," he said impatiently, "I'm in a great hurry, I'm waited for. Let us cut it short, if you please."

But she would listen to nothing, unless he

went through the proper formalities. Her principle was that things are not ugly in themselves, but become or cease to be so, according to the way in which they are presented.

—— "Well!" he rejoined, "we're speaking of a good action, mademoiselle. . . . I'm afraid my wife is concealing some grief from me. I have seen her looking sad for some weeks, and I thought of you to find out about it for me."

—— "You may count on me," she then said with maternal effusiveness. "I am devoted to madame, and will do everything in the interest of her honor and yours. . . . We will begin watching over her to-morrow."

He promised to reward her for her services. She was angry at first. Then she was clever enough to force him to fix a sum, — he was to give her ten thousand francs if she got him a formal proof of madame's good or bad conduct. Little by little they had come to a definite point.

After this Nantas tormented himself less. Three months passed by; he was engaged on an important work, preparing the budget. With the emperor's approval he had made important modifications in the financial system. He knew he should be sharply attacked in the Chambre,

and had to prepare a considerable quantity of documents. He often worked the whole night through. It stupefied him, and kept up his patience. Whenever he saw mademoiselle Chuin he would question her briefly. Did she know anything? Had madame paid many calls? Had she stopped particularly at certain houses? Mademoiselle Chuin kept a detailed journal; but she had as yet collected only unimportant facts. Nantas began to feel reassured, whereas the old woman would wink now and then, saying that perhaps she would soon get hold of something new.

The truth was that mademoiselle Chuin had thought the matter over very carefully. Ten thousand francs did not fill her bill; she wanted twenty thousand, to buy the notary's house. At first she thought of selling herself to the wife, after selling herself to the husband; but she knew madame, and was afraid of being discharged at the first word. Even before she had been intrusted with this job she had long played the spy upon her, on her own account, remembering that the masters' vices are the valets' fortune; but she had struck upon a snag in the shape of one of those upright natures, which are all the more solid for being based on pride. Flavie owed all men a grudge for her past fault;

and mademoiselle Chuin was in despair, when one day she met M. des Fondettes. He asked about her mistress, with so lively an interest, that she saw at once that he was wild with desire for her, burning with the recollection of the minute he had held her in his arms. And her plan was made, — to serve both husband and lover at the same time; that was a stroke of genius.

Indeed everything was coming to a head. M. des Fondettes, repulsed as he had been, and now without hope for the future, would have given his fortune, once more to possess this woman who had once been his. It was he who took the initiative in sounding mademoiselle Chuin. He saw her again, played the sentimental, and swore he would kill himself if she did not help him. By the end of a week, after a great show of sensibility and scruples, the bargain was struck: he was to pay ten thousand francs, and she was to hide him some evening in Flavie's room.

Mademoiselle Chuin came to Nantas in the morning.

—— "What have you found out?" he asked, turning pale.

But she said nothing definite at first. She was sure madame had some liaison. She even made assignations.

——"To be sure, to be sure," he repeated, wild with impatience.

At last she mentioned M. des Fondettes's name.

——"He will be in madame's room this evening."

——"Very well, thank you," stammered Nantas.

He motioned her to go; he was afraid of fainting before her. This sudden dismissal astonished and delighted her, for she had expected a long examination and had even prepared her answers, so as not to get confused. She dropped a courtesy and withdrew with as doleful a face as she could summon up.

Nantas rose from his chair. As soon as he was alone he spoke aloud,—

——"This evening. . . . In her room. . . ."

And he carried his hands to his head as though he heard his skull cracking. This assignation, given in the very house where they both lived, struck him as a monstrous piece of impudence. He could not let himself be outraged in this way. He clenched his fists for the struggle; in his rage he thought of murder. But he had work that must be finished. Three times he seated himself at his desk, and three times an uprising of his whole body brought

him to his feet again; he felt something pushing him from behind, an imperative longing to go straight up to his wife's room and call her a drab to her face. At length he mastered himself, swearing that he would strangle them both that evening. It was the greatest victory he had ever won over himself.

That afternoon Nantas went to submit his final scheme of the budget to the emperor. As the latter made some objections, he discussed them with perfect lucidity; but he had to promise to modify a whole portion of his plan. The bill was to be presented on the following day.

—— "Sire, I will work at it all night," he said.

And on his way home he thought: "I'll kill them at midnight, and then I shall have till daylight to finish my work."

At dinner that evening, baron Danvilliers happened to speak of that bill relating to the budget, which was making so much talk. He did not approve all his son-in-law's ideas on finance; but he thought them very liberal and noteworthy. While replying to the baron, Nantas thought several times that he caught his wife's eyes fixed upon his. She often looked at him in that way now. Not that she

looked more tenderly upon him, but that she seemed to be trying to read what was behind his face. Nantas thought she was afraid she might have been betrayed. He made an effort, too, to appear unpreoccupied: he talked a great deal, took very high ground, and at last convinced his father-in-law, who gave in to his strong intellect. Flavie still kept looking at him; and for an instant a scarcely perceptible softness passed over her face.

Nantas worked in his study up to midnight. He got interested in his work, little by little; nothing existed but this creation of his, this financial machinery which he had slowly constructed, wheel by wheel, through obstacles without number. When the clock struck twelve he instinctively raised his head. A profound silence reigned in the hôtel. All of a sudden he remembered: adultery was there, in the depths of this darkness and silence. But he found it an exertion to leave his chair; he laid down his pen regretfully, and took a few steps in obedience to a former will, which now seemed no longer active. Then a hot flush crimsoned his face, a flame lit up his eyes; and he went up to his wife's room.

Flavie had dismissed her maid early that evening. She wished to be alone. She stayed

till midnight in the little salon that opened into her bedroom. She lay down on a lounge and took up a book; but the book kept falling from her hands, and she lay there in a brown study, with her eyes fixed upon vacancy. Her face turned softer still; a pale smile flitted across it at times.

Of a sudden she sprang up. Some one had knocked.

—— "Who's there?"

—— "Open the door," answered Nantas.

It took her so by surprise that she opened it mechanically. Never had her husband come thus to her room. He went in, completely upset; his rage had taken possession of him once more on his way up-stairs. Mademoiselle Chuin, who was on the lookout for him on the landing, had just whispered in his ear that M. des Fondettes had been there two hours. So he did not mince matters.

—— "Madam," said he, "there is a man concealed in your room."

Flavie did not answer at once, so far was all this from her thoughts. At last she took it in.

—— "You are mad, Sir," she muttered.

But without waiting to discuss the point, he was already on his way to her room. Then with a bound, she sprang between him and the door, crying out, —

—— "You shall not go in. . . . I am in my own rooms here, and I forbid you to go in!"

Trembling with anger and looking more than her height, she defended her door. They stood there motionless for an instant, without a word, looking each other in the eye.. He, with outstretched neck and hands, was about to throw himself upon her, to make her let him pass.

—— "Get out of there," he muttered harshly. "I am stronger than you, and will go in in spite of you."

—— "No, you shall not go in; I will not have it."

He repeated madly, —

—— "There is a man in there, there is a man. . . ."

She shrugged her shoulders, not even deigning to deny it. Then, as he advanced a step farther, —

—— "Well, then! Suppose there is a man, what can that matter to you? Am I not free?"

He drew back at this speech, which tingled like a slap in the face. It was true: she was free. A cold shiver passed over his shoulders; he saw clearly that she had the stronger part in the drama, and that he was playing a scene fit for a sick and illogical child. He was not sticking to their bargain, his stupid passion

made him odious. Why had he not stayed at work in his study? The blood left his cheeks, a shadow of ineffable suffering blanched his face. When Flavie saw the upheaval going on within him, she stepped aside from the door, while a touch of sweetness softened her eyes.

—— "Look and see," she said simply.

And she went in herself, holding up a lamp in her hand, while Nantas stopped on the threshold. He made a sign to her that it was needless, that he did not care to look; but she now insisted upon it. When she came to the bed she raised the curtains, and M. des Fondettes appeared, hidden behind them. She was so astounded that she gave a shriek of dismay.

—— "It is true," she stammered out distractedly,—"it is true, this man was here. I didn't know it. Oh! on my life, I swear it!"

Then, by an effort of will, she calmed her self; she even seemed to regret the first impulse which had prompted her to defend herself.

—— "You were right, Sir, and I ask your pardon," she said to Nantas, trying to resume her cold voice.

Meanwhile M. des Fondettes felt himself to be in a ridiculous position. He looked foolish, and would have given a good deal to have the

husband get angry. But Nantas spoke not a word. He only turned very pale. When he had looked from M. des Fondettes to Flavie, he bowed to the latter, saying only,—

—— "Excuse me, Madam, you are free."

And he turned his back and left them. Something in him had given way; the machinery of bone and muscle alone continued to work. When he got back to his study he went straight to a drawer in which he kept a revolver. After examining the weapon he said aloud, as if making a formal compact with himself, —

—— "Come, it's enough; by and by, I'll kill myself."

He wound up the lamp, which was burning low, seated himself at his desk, and went quietly to work again. Without a hesitation he went on with the sentence he had begun, in the midst of the dead silence. One by one, methodically, the sheets grew to a heap. Two hours later, when Flavie had turned out M. des Fondettes and came down barefoot to listen at the study door, all she could hear was the faint sound of his pen scratching on the paper. Then she bent down and put her eye to the keyhole. Nantas was still writing with the same calmness, his face expressed the peaceful satisfaction of work, while a ray from the lamp lit up the barrel of the revolver by his side.

V

THE house abutting on the hôtel garden was now Nantas's property; he had bought it of his father-in-law. It was a whim of his not to have the narrow attic rented, the room in which he had fought with poverty when he first came to Paris. Since his great fortune, he had repeatedly had an irrepressible desire to go up there and lock himself in for an hour or two. It was there that he had suffered, it was there he wished to triumph. When he found an obstacle in his path, he liked to go up there and think it over, to form all the great determinations of his life there. There he became once more what he used to be; and now, with suicide staring him in the face, it was in this attic that he resolved to die.

Nantas did not finish his work that morning before eight o'clock. Fearing that he might drop off asleep from fatigue, he bathed his face and hands in cold water. Then he called several of his employees, one after another, and gave them orders. When his secretary came,

he had a talk with him: the secretary was to take the bill relating to the budget immediately to the Tuileries and explain certain points, if the emperor should make any fresh objections. Then Nantas thought he had done enough. He was leaving everything in order, he would not go off like a bankrupt struck with lunacy. At last he was his own and could dispose of himself without being accused of egoism or cowardice.

It struck nine. The time had come; but as he started to leave his study, taking his revolver with him, he had one last cup of bitterness to drain. Mademoiselle Chuin had come for her promised ten thousand francs. Her manner was maternal, she treated him rather like a successful pupil. Had he still hesitated, this shameful complicity would have made up his mind to suicide. He went briskly up to the attic and, in his hurry, left the key in the door.

Nothing was changed. There were the same rents in the paper; the bed, table, and chair were still there, with their smell of whilom poverty. For a moment he breathed that air which recalled his former struggles. Then he went to the window and saw the same view of Paris, the trees in the hôtel garden, the Seine,

the quays, a whole strip of the right bank where the sea of houses rolled on and upward, growing dimmer and dimmer out to distant Père-La-chaise.

The revolver lay on the rickety table, within reach of his hand. There was no hurry now, he was sure no one would come, and he could kill himself as he pleased. He fell a-thinking: here he was, at the same point as in the days gone by, brought back to the same place, with the same intent of suicide. One evening he had meant to break his head here; he was too poor then to buy a pistol, he only had the street paving; but death was at the end of it, all the same. So death was the only thing in this life that did not disappoint you, that was always certain and always ready. It was the only assured thing he knew of; look about him as he might, all else had continually given way beneath him, death alone remained a certainty; and he felt a regret at having lived ten years too long. The experience he had had of life, in rising to fortune and power, seemed puerile. What availed all this expenditure of will, what availed all this force he had exerted, since will and force were decidedly not all? A passion had sufficed to overthrow him; he had fallen foolishly in love with Flavie, and the monument he had been

building had cracked and crumbled like a card house, swept away by a child's breath. It was miserable: like the punishment of a marauding schoolboy, beneath whose weight the branch breaks and who comes to grief there where he has sinned. Life was silly; men of brains and ability ended as flatly as fools.

Nantas took the revolver from the table and slowly cocked it. One last regret softened him for a second at this supreme moment. What great things he would have realized, had Flavie but understood him! The day she should have thrown her arms round his neck and said, "I love you!" — that day he would have found a lever to raise the world; and his last thought was one of profound contempt for force, since force, which had given him all, could not give him Flavie.

He raised his weapon. It was a superb morning. Through the open window the sun streamed in, filling the attic with an awakening of youth. In the far distance Paris was beginning its labor of a giant city. Nantas put the barrel to his temple.

But the door was violently thrown open, and Flavie came in. She turned aside the shot with a movement of her arm, and the ball buried itself in the ceiling. She was so out of breath,

so choking, that she could not speak. At last, tutoyéing Nantas for the first time, she spoke the word he had been waiting for, the only word that could have determined him to live, —

—— "I love thee!" she cried, sobbing on his neck, wrenching this avowal from her pride, from her whole conquered being, — "I love thee, because thou art strong!"

HOW WE DIE

HOW WE DIE

I.

THE comte de Verteuil is fifty-five. He belongs to one of the most famous families in France, and has a large fortune. At odds with the government, he has employed his time as best he could; has contributed articles to serious magazines, which have gained him admission to the Academy of moral and political sciences, has thrown himself into business, has been successively enthusiastic over agriculture, stock farming, and the fine arts. At one time he was even deputy, and distinguished himself by the violence of his opposition.

The comtesse Mathilde de Verteuil is forty-six. She is still quoted as the most adorable blonde in Paris. Age seems to ripen her skin. She used to be rather thin; now her shoulders, in maturing, have acquired the roundness of a silky fruit. Never was she more beautiful. When she enters a drawing-room, with her golden hair and the satin of her bust, she appears like a rising star; and women of twenty envy her.

The household of the count and countess is one of those that are not talked about. They married as people in their world oftenest do marry. Some persons will even assure you that they lived together very happily for six years. At that time they had a son, Roger, who is a lieutenant, and a daughter, Blanche, whom they married off last year to M. de Bussac, maître des requêtes. They approach each other through their children. Since they broke with one another, years ago, they have remained good friends, with a vast fund of selfishness. They consult together, treat each other with perfect affability in society, but shut themselves up afterwards in their own apartments, where they receive their intimate friends as they please.

But, one night, Mathilde comes home from a ball about two in the morning. Her maid undresses her; then, just as she is about to withdraw, says, —

—— "Monsieur le comte has been a little unwell this evening."

The countess, half asleep, lazily turns her head.

—— "Ah!" she murmurs.

She stretches herself, and adds, —

—— "Wake me to-morrow at ten; I expect the dressmaker."

Next day, at breakfast, as the count does not appear, the countess first sends to ask after him; then she makes up her mind to go and see him. She finds him in bed, very pale and very precise in dress and bearing. Three physicians have been there already, have talked together in an undertone, and left prescriptions; they are to return in the evening. The sick man is cared for by two servants, who go about the room, grave and mute, stifling the noise of their heels on the carpet. The large chamber sleeps in cold severity; not a towel is lying about, not a piece of furniture is out of its place. It is proper and dignified sickness, ceremonious sickness, that expects calls.

——"So you are unwell, my dear?" asks the countess, as she comes into the room.

The count makes an effort to smile.

——"Oh! a little fatigue," answers he. "I only need rest. . . . I thank you for taking the trouble to come."

Two days pass by. The chamber remains dignified; everything is in its place, the medicines disappear without leaving a spot on the furniture. The servants' close-shaven faces do not even permit themselves to express a sense of boredom. Yet the count knows that he is in danger of death; he has exacted the truth

from his physicians, and lets them do their will, without a complaint. Most of the time he lies there with closed eyes, or else looks steadily before him, as if thinking of his loneliness.

——"Well? are you better, my dear?"

——"Yes, much better, I thank you, my dear Mathilde."

——"If you wished, I would stay with you."

——"No, there is no need of that. Julien and François do very well. . . . What is the use of tiring you?"

They understand each other; they have lived apart, and mean to die apart. The count has that bitter, selfish satisfaction of the egoist, who wishes to depart alone, without having around his bed the comedies of grief. He abridges as far as possible, for himself and the countess, the irksomeness of the last interview. His last will is to vanish with propriety, as a man of the world who means to trouble and excite repugnance in no one.

Yet, one evening, he has no breath left; he knows that he will not live through the night. Then, as the countess comes up to pay her usual visit, he says to her, calling up a last smile, —

——"Do not go. . . . I do not feel well."

He would spare her the world's tittle-tattle.

She, on her part, expected this of him; and she takes her place in the room. The physicians do not leave the dying man. The two servants finish their duty with the same silent assiduousness. The children, Roger and Blanche, have been sent for, and are at the bedside next their mother. Other relatives are in a neighboring room. The night passes so, in solemn waiting. In the morning the last sacraments are brought, the count receives communion in the presence of all, to give a last support to religion. The ceremony is over; he can die.

But he is in no haste; he seems to regain his strength, so as to avoid a convulsive and clamorous death. His breathing, in the large, severe room, gives forth only the broken sound of a clock out of order. It is a well-bred man who is passing away; and, when he has kissed his wife and children, he pushes them from him with a movement of his arm; he falls toward the wall, and dies alone.

Then one of the physicians bends over him, closes the dead man's eyes. He says in an undertone, —

—— "It is all over."

Sighs and tears rise amid the stillness. The countess, Roger, and Blanche are on their

knees. They weep between their clasped hands; you do not see their faces. Then the two children lead away their mother, who, at the door, sways her body in one last sob, to emphasize her despair; and, from this moment, the dead man belongs to the pomp of his obsequies.

The physicians have gone, rounding their shoulders, and assuming an expression of vague disconsolateness. The parish priest is sent for, to wake with the body. The two servants stay with this priest, seated on chairs, stiff and full of dignity; it is the expected end of their service. One of them espies a spoon that has been left on a table; he gets up, and slips it quickly into his pocket, that the fine orderliness of the room may not be disturbed.

In the room below, the great drawing-room, a noise of hammering is heard; the upholsterers are getting it ready for the dead man to lie in state. The whole day is taken up with the embalming; the doors are closed, the embalmer is alone with his assistants. When they bring the count down-stairs, next day, and he is exposed, he is in evening dress, he has the freshness of youth.

At nine, on the morning of the funeral, the house begins to fill with the murmur of voices. The son and son-in-law of the deceased receive

the crowd in a parlor on the ground floor; they bow, they preserve the mute politeness of people in affliction. All the notabilities are there: the nobility, the army, the magistracy; there are even senators and members of the Institute.

At ten, at last, the procession sets out for the church. The hearse is a first-class vehicle, adorned with plumes, draped in silver-fringed hangings. The pallbearers are a marshal of France, a duke, an old friend of the deceased, an ex-minister, and an academician. Roger de Verteuil and M. de Bussac lead the mourning. Next comes the procession, a wave of people in black gloves and cravats, all of them personages of importance, puffing through the dust, and walking with the dull tread of a dispersed flock of sheep.

The whole neighborhood is at the windows; people stand in rows on the sidewalk, raise their hats, and watch the triumphal hearse pass by, with a shake of the head. The street is blocked by the endless line of mourning coaches, almost all empty; omnibuses and fiacres are piled up in the cross streets; you hear the coachmen's oaths and the crack of whips. And, all this time, the comtesse de Verteuil is at home, shut up in her room, having given out that her tears have overcome her,

Stretched out on a lounge, playing with the tassel of her girdle, she looks at the ceiling, relieved and pensive.

At the church the ceremony lasts nearly two hours. All the clergy is agog; ever since early morning, you could see nothing but priests running busily about in surplices, giving orders, mopping their foreheads, blowing their noses with resounding snorts. In the middle of the nave, hung with black, a catafalque is flaming. At last, the cortège has been shown to its seats, the women on the left, the men on the right; the organ peals forth its lamentations, the choristers chant in hollow moanings, the choir boys give shrill sobs; while, in the cressets, green flames burn high, adding their funereal pallor to the pomp of the ceremony.

——"Isn't Faure to sing?" asks a deputy of his neighbor.

——"Yes, I think so," answers the neighbor, a resplendent individual, given to smiling at the ladies across the aisle.

And, as the singer's voice rises in the thrilled nave,—

——"Ah! what a method, what breadth of style!" he goes on in an undertone, nodding his head in ecstasy.

All present are enraptured. The ladies think

of their evenings at the Opéra. This Faure really has talent! A friend of the deceased goes so far as to say, —

—— "He never sang better! . . . It's a pity poor Verteuil can't hear him, he who liked him so much!"

The choristers, in black copes, walk round the catafalque. The priests, twenty in number, complicate the ceremonial, make genuflections, wave their holy-water sprinklers. At last, the mourners themselves file before the casket, the sprinklers are handed round. And they go out, after shaking hands with the family. Outside, the broad daylight blinds the crowd.

It is a fine June day. Filmy threads fly in the hot air. Then before the church, in the little square, there is jostling and pushing. The procession takes long in re-forming. Those who do not care to go farther vanish. Over two hundred yards off, at the end of the street, you already see the plumes of the hearse nodding and losing themselves in the distance, while the square is still all blocked up with carriages. You hear the slamming of the carriage doors and the brisk trot of the horses on the paving. Yet the coachmen fall into line, the procession makes for the cemetery.

The people in the carriages are at their ease; you might imagine them to be going to the Bois, slowly, in the Paris spring weather. As the hearse is no longer in sight, the burial is soon forgotten; and conversations are started, the ladies talk of the summer season, the men chat about their business.

——"Tell me, my dear, are you going to Dieppe again, this year?"

——"Yes, perhaps. But it will never be till August. . . . We go on Saturday to our place in the Loire."

——"Come now, my dear fellow, he did intercept the letter, and the duel came off. Oh! in the prettiest way in the world; a mere scratch. . . . In the evening, I dined with him at the club. He even let me in for twenty-five louis."

——"I say, isn't the meeting of stockholders for day after to-morrow? . . . They want to propose me on the committee. I'm so busy that I don't know that I shall be able. . . ."

A minute ago, the procession turned into an avenue. A cool shade falls from the trees, and the sunshine sings gleefully amid the foliage. All of a sudden, a giddy lady leans out of a carriage window, and exclaims, —

——"Really! it's enchanting out here!"

Just at this point the procession turns into the Montparnasse cemetery. Voices are hushed, nothing is heard save the wheels grinding on the gravel of the avenues. They have to go quite to the end; the Verteuils' lot is there, on the left, — a large tomb of white marble, a sort of chapel, with much ornamental carving. The casket is set down before the door of this chapel, and the speeches begin.

There are four. The ex-minister retraces the political life of the deceased, whom he represents to have been a modest genius, who would have served his country, had he not disdained intriguing. Next, a friend speaks of the private virtues of him whom the whole world bewails. Then an unknown gentleman addresses the assembled crowd as delegate of an industrial society of which the comte de Verteuil was honorary president. At last, a little grizzly man expresses the regrets of the Academy of moral and political sciences.

All the while, those present take an interest in the surrounding tombs, read the inscriptions on the marble slabs. Those who listen hard catch only a word, here and there. An old man with pursed-up lips, after catching these fragments of sentences, " . . . the noble heart, the generosity and benevolence of a great

character . . ." mutters, with a jerk of his chin, —

——"Ah, indeed! yes, I knew him, he was every inch a skinflint!"

The last farewell flies away into the air. When the priests have blest the body, the people withdraw, and no one is left in that sequestered nook but the gravediggers, who are letting down the casket into the grave. The cords run out with a dull, scraping sound, the oak casket creaks. Monsieur le comte de Verteuil is at home.

And the countess, on her lounge, has not stirred. She is still playing with the tassel of her girdle, her eyes on the ceiling, lost in a revery which, little by little, brings a blush to her cheeks, beautiful blonde that she is.

II

Madame Guérard is a widow. Her husband, whom she lost eight years ago, was a magistrate. She belongs to the upper bourgeoisie, and has a fortune of two millions. She has three children, three sons, who, at their father's death, inherited five hundred thousand francs apiece. But these sons have grown up like weeds in this austere, cold, and prim family, with appetites and crackbrained crotchets that came no one knows whence. They ran through their five hundred thousand francs in a few years. The eldest, Charles, had a passion for mechanics, and squandered insane sums on extraordinary inventions. The second, Georges, let himself be devoured by women. The third, Maurice, was swindled by a friend, with whom he undertook to build a theatre. To-day the three sons are dependent on their mother, who is willing to feed and lodge them, but prudently keeps the cupboard keys on her own person.

All these people live in a large apartment in the rue de Turenne, in the Marais. Madame

Guérard is sixty years old. With age have come fixed ideas. She exacts, in her home, the quiet and cleanliness of a cloister. She is miserly, counts the lumps of sugar, locks up the half-emptied bottles herself, gives out the linen and crockery piecemeal, according to the needs of the household. No doubt, her sons are very fond of her, and she has maintained absolute authority over them, in spite of their thirty years and their follies. But, when she finds herself alone with these three big devils, she has half-conscious anxieties, she is always afraid they will ask her for money, and does not quite see how to refuse them. For this reason, she has taken care to invest her fortune in real estate: she owns three houses in Paris, and some land in the direction of Vincennes. These pieces of property give her the greatest trouble; only, her mind is at rest, she finds excuses for not giving large sums at a time.

Charles, Georges, and Maurice, however, get as much out of the house as they can. They live on there, quarrelling over every morsel, each one throwing the others' ravenous greed in their faces. Their mother's death will make them rich again; they know it, and find it a sufficient pretext for waiting and doing nothing.

Although they never speak of it, their constant preoccupation is to find out how the property will be divided; if they cannot come to an agreement, everything will have to be sold, which is always a ruinous operation. And they let their mind dwell on these matters, without any evil longing, solely because it is well to foresee everything. They are cheery, good-natured fellows, of average honesty; like everybody, they hope their mother will live as long as possible. They are waiting, that is all.

One evening, on getting up from table, madame Guérard does not feel well. Her sons make her go to bed, and leave her with the chambermaid, on her assuring them that she is better, that she has only a severe head-ache. But next day the old lady has grown worse; the family physician, not without anxiety, asks for a consultation. Madame Guérard is in great danger. Then, for a week, a drama is played by the dying woman's bedside.

Her first care, when she saw herself confined to her room by sickness, was to have all the keys given her, and to hide them under her pillow. She still tries to rule from her bed, to protect her cupboards against waste. Struggles go on within her, she is racked with doubts.

She makes up her mind only after long hesitations. Her three sons are there, and she studies them with her dim eyes, she waits for a happy inspiration.

One day she has confidence in Georges. She beckons him to her side, and says in an undertone, —

—— "Here, here is the key to the sideboard; take the sugar. . . . You will lock it up safe again, and bring me back the key."

Another day she distrusts Georges, she follows him about with her eye as soon as he stirs, as if she were afraid of seeing him slip the knickknacks on the mantelpiece into his pockets. She calls Charles, intrusts him with a key in his turn, muttering, —

—— "The chambermaid will go with you. You will see that she takes out some sheets, and will lock up, yourself."

At death's door, this is her torment, — no longer to be able to watch over the household expenses. She recalls her children's follies, she knows them to be lazy, large eaters, crack-brained, open-handed. She has long since lost all respect for them, who have realized none of her dreams, who wound her in her austere and thrifty habits. Her affection alone survives and forgives. In the depths of

her entreating eyes can be read that she implores them to wait till she is no longer there, before emptying her drawers and dividing her possessions. This division before her very eyes would be a torture to her expiring avarice.

Meanwhile, Charles, Georges, and Maurice are very kind to her. They arrange among themselves to have one of them always with their mother. A sincere affection appears in the slightest things they do for her. But, inevitably, they bring with them the thoughtlessness of out of doors, the smell of the cigar they have just smoked, their preoccupation with the news of the town. The sick woman's egoism suffers at her not being all in all to them in her last hour. Then, when she grows weaker, her distrust casts an ever-greater embarrassment between the young men and herself. If they were not thinking of the fortune they are to inherit, she would put the thought of this money into their heads by the way she guards it up to her last breath. She looks at them with so keen an eye, in such evident fear, that they turn away their heads. Then she thinks they are standing as spies at her deathbed; and, in truth, they do think of it, they are continually brought back to the

idea by the mute questioning of her gaze. It is she who awakens cupidity in them. When she catches one of them looking thoughtful, his face pale, she says to him, —

—— "Come here to me. . . . What are you thinking of?"

—— "Nothing, mother."

But he started. She shakes her head slowly and adds, —

——"I give you a great deal of care, my children. Come, don't worry. I shall soon be here no more."

They surround her, they swear they love her and will save her. She answers no, with an obstinate shake of her head; she plunges still deeper into her distrust. It is a frightful death, poisoned by money.

The sickness lasts three weeks. There have already been five consultations; the greatest medical celebrities have been called in. The chambermaid helps madame's sons take care of her; and, in spite of all precautions, a little disorder has crept into the room. All hope is lost, the physician announces that the patient may pass away at any time.

So, one morning that her sons think her asleep, they are standing near a window, talking among themselves about a difficulty that has come up.

It is the 15th of July; she was in the habit of collecting the rent of her houses herself, and they are in a quandary, not knowing how to get hold of this money. The janitors have already asked for orders. In her weak condition, they cannot talk business with her. Yet, if an accident were to occur, they would need the rents to defray certain personal expenses.

——"Good heavens!" says Charles in an undertone, "I'll go if you wish, and call upon the tenants. . . . They will understand the situation, and pay up."

But Georges and Maurice do not seem to relish this plan. They, too, have grown suspicious.

——"We might go with you," says the former. "All three of us will have to pay out something."

——"Well! I will bring you the money. . . . You don't suppose I would run away with it, I hope!"

——"No; but it would be just as well for us to be together. It will be more regular."

And they look at one another with eyes in which already glisten the anger and ill-will of sharing. The succession is open; each one wants to secure the largest share for

himself. Charles suddenly goes on, carrying out aloud the idea that his brothers are revolving silently in their heads,—

"Listen: we will sell; that will be best. . . . If we quarrel to-day, we shall come to blows to-morrow."

But a rattling in the sick woman's throat makes them turn their heads quickly. Their mother has risen up in bed, white, with haggard eyes, her body shaken with a fit of trembling. She has heard, she stretches out her lean arms, she repeats in a voice of terror, —

—— "My children. . . . My children. . . ."

And a spasm throws her back upon her pillow; she dies with the atrocious thought in her mind that her sons are robbing her.

All three have fallen upon their knees in consternation by the bedside. They kiss the dead woman's hands, they close her eyes with sobs. At this moment, their childhood rises once more in their hearts, and they are, now and evermore, nothing but orphans. But this frightful death remains in the depths of their being, as a remorse and as a hate.

The dead woman is washed and robed by the chambermaid. A sister of charity is sent for to wake with the body. Meanwhile, the sons are running on errands; they go and make their

declaration of the decease, order the engraved announcements to relatives and friends, arrange for the funeral ceremony. At night they relieve one another, and watch with the sister. In the room, the curtains of which are drawn, the dead woman lies stretched out on the bed, her head rigid, her hands crossed, a silver crucifix on her breast. A sprig of box hangs over the rim of a vase filled with holy-water. By her side burns a wax candle. And the wake ends in the shivering morning. The sister asks for some warm milk, because she does not feel well.

An hour before the funeral, the staircase fills with people. The porte-cochère is hung with black drapery with a silver fringe. There the coffin is exposed, as in the depths of a narrow chapel, surrounded with candles, covered with wreaths and bouquets. Every one who enters takes a sprinkler from the holy-water basin at the foot of the bier, and besprinkles the body. At eleven, the funeral procession sets out. The sons of the deceased lead the mourning. Behind them you recognize magistrates, some large manufacturers, a whole solemn and pompous bourgeoisie, keeping step as they walk, casting side glances at the inquisitive crowd drawn up along the

sidewalks. The procession closes with twelve mourning coaches. People count them; they are much commented on in the neighborhood.

Meanwhile, those present are filled with pity for Charles, Georges, and Maurice, in evening dress, gloved in black, walking behind the coffin, their heads bowed down, their faces reddened with tears. For the rest, there is but one exclamation, — they are burying their mother in very proper fashion. The hearse is of the third class; it is calculated that they will be in for several thousand francs. An old notary says with a shrewd smile, —

—— "If madame Guérard had paid for her funeral herself, she would have saved on six carriages."

At the church, the portal is draped, the organ plays, the absolution is given by the parish curé. Then, when the congregation have filed before the body, they find the three sons drawn up in a single line at the entrance of the nave, stationed there to shake hands with those present who are unable to go to the cemetery. For ten minutes they hold out their arms, press hands without even recognizing people, biting their lips, holding back their tears; and it is a great relief to them when the church is empty, and they resume their slow march behind the hearse.

The Guérards' family vault is in the cemetery of Père-Lachaise. Many go on foot, others get into the mourning coaches. The procession crosses the place de la Bastille, and follows the rue de la Roquette. The passers-by raise their eyes and take off their hats. It is a rich funeral, at which the workmen of that quarter gaze, as it passes, while they eat their sausages stuffed into slits cut in pieces of bread.

Arriving at the cemetery, the procession turns to the left, and at once finds itself in front of the tomb, in the shape of a Gothic chapel, bearing on its pediment these words, cut in black, — *Famille Guérard.* The ornamented cast-iron door, thrown wide open, discloses an altar table, on which candles are burning. Around the monument are rows of other structures, in the same taste, forming actual streets; it looks like a cabinet-maker's shop front, with wardrobes, chests of drawers, secretaries, newly finished and arranged in symmetrical rows in the show window. The people present are wool-gathering, impressed by this architecture, looking around for a little shade under the trees of the neighboring avenue. A lady has stepped aside to admire a superb rose-bush, growing like a bouquet of fragrant blossoms over a gravestone.

Meanwhile, the coffin has been lifted down from the hearse. A priest says the last prayers, while the gravediggers, in blue jackets, are waiting a few steps off. The three sons sob, their eyes fixed on the gaping vault, the slab of which has been removed; there, in this cool shade, they, in their turn, will one day come to sleep. Some friends lead them away, when the gravediggers come up.

And, two days later, in the office of their mother's notary, they are disputing, with set teeth, dry eyes, and the passion of enemies who have made up their minds not to give in on a single centime. It would be for their interest to wait, not to hurry on the sale of the property. But they cast their bald truths in each others' teeth: Charles would run through it all with his inventions; Georges must have some girl to fleece him; Maurice is surely engaged in another wildcat speculation that would swallow up their whole capital. In vain, the notary tries to induce them to come to an amicable understanding. They separate, threatening to send one another stamped paper.

It is the dead woman awaking in them once more, with her avarice and her terror of being robbed. When money poisons death, from death comes nothing but wrath. There is fighting over coffins.

III

M. Rousseau, at twenty, married an orphan, Adèle Lemercier, who was eighteen. Together they had seventy francs on the evening of their setting up housekeeping. At first they sold note-paper and sticks of sealing wax under a doorway. Next, they hired a hole, a shop the size of your hand, where they stayed ten years, adding to their business little by little. Now they keep a stationery shop in the rue de Clichy, worth fully fifty thousand francs.

Adèle has not a strong constitution. She has always coughed a little. The close air of the shop, the sedentary life behind the counter, are not good for her. A physician they consulted recommended rest and walks out of doors in fine weather. But prescriptions of that sort cannot be followed, when you are bent upon piling up a small income quickly, to live on it in peace. Adèle said she would rest and take walks later, after they had sold out and retired to the provinces.

As for M. Rousseau, he is anxious, to be sure,

on days when he sees her pale, with red spots on her cheeks. Only he has his stationery business to absorb him, he cannot always be at her elbow to prevent imprudences on her part. For weeks together he cannot find a minute to speak to her about her health. Then, if he happens to hear her little dry cough, he scolds her, he makes her put on her shawl and take a turn in the Champs-Elysées. But she comes back more tired, coughing harder; the bustle of business once more takes hold of M. Rousseau; the sickness is again forgotten till another crisis comes. It is the way in business: you die without having time for treatment.

One day, M. Rousseau takes the physician aside, and asks him to tell him frankly if his wife is in danger. The physician begins by saying that one must trust to nature, that he has seen many much sicker people pull through. Then, cornered with questions, he confesses that madame Rousseau is in a consumption, even in a pretty advanced stage. The husband turns white at this avowal. He loves Adèle for their long struggle together before they had white bread to eat every day. He has in her not only a wife, but a partner, whose energy he knows. If he loses her, he will be stricken at once in his affection and in his business.

Yet he must take heart, he cannot shut up his shop, to weep at leisure. So he shows nothing, he tries not to frighten Adèle by letting her see him with red eyes. He resumes his jog-trot life. By the end of a month, whenever he thinks of these sad things, he manages to persuade himself that doctors are often mistaken. His wife does not seem any worse. And so it comes about that he sees her die by inches, without suffering too much himself, his mind taken up with his avocations, expecting a catastrophe, but mentally postponing it to an unlimited future.

Sometimes Adèle repeats,—

——"Ah! when we get into the country, you will see how well I shall be. . . . Good Lord! we have only eight years to wait now. The time will go quickly."

And M. Rousseau does not remember that they might retire at once, on smaller savings. To begin with, Adèle would not agree to it. When you have made up your mind to a figure, you must reach it.

Nevertheless, madame Rousseau has had to take to her bed twice already. She has got up from it again, and come down to the counter. The neighbors say, "There is a little woman who won't go far"; and they are not wrong. Just at the time for taking account of stock, she

is put to bed for the third time. The physician comes in the morning, talks with her, signs a prescription absent-mindedly. M. Rousseau is warned, and knows that the fatal catastrophe is drawing near. But taking account of stock keeps him down-stairs in the shop, and it is all he can do to escape for five minutes, from time to time. He goes up, when the physician is there; then he leaves the room with him, and reappears for a moment before breakfast; he goes to bed at eleven in a little room, almost a closet, into which he has put a cot bed. Françoise, the maid, tends the sick woman. A terrible girl, this Françoise, from Auvergne, with great bullying hands, and of dubious civility and cleanliness! She is rough with the dying woman, brings her her medicine scowling, makes an intolerable noise sweeping the room, which she leaves in great disorder; phials, all sticky on the outside, lie about on the chest of drawers, the washbasins are never washed, dishcloths hang over the backs of chairs; you don't know where to set your foot, so littered up is the floor. Yet madame Rousseau does not complain, and is content to rap on the wall with her fist, to call the maid, when the latter does not answer. Françoise has other fish to fry beside taking care of her; she has to keep the shop clean, do

the cooking for master and clerks, not to mention errands in the neighborhood and other odd jobs. So that madame cannot require her to be always by her side. She is cared for when there is time.

Besides, even in bed, Adèle thinks of business. She follows the sales; asks every evening how things are getting on. The account of stock makes her anxious. When her husband can come up to her room for a few minutes, she never speaks to him about her health; she asks him solely about the probable net profit. She is much chagrined at learning that the year is only middling, fourteen hundred francs behind last year. While burning with fever on her pillow, she still remembers the last week's orders; she sets the accounts straight; she manages the house. And it is she who sends her husband away, if he forgets himself in her room. His being there will not cure her, and it is bad for the business. She is sure the clerks are staring at the passers-by, and she keeps repeating, —

—— "Go down, dear; I want nothing, I assure you. And don't forget to lay in a stock of copybooks; because the schools open soon, and we must not be short of them."

For a long while she tries to ignore her real

condition. She always hopes to get up next day, and take her place at the counter once more. She even makes plans: if she can leave the house soon, they will go and spend a Sunday at Saint-Cloud. Never has she had such a longing to see the trees. Then, of a sudden, one morning, she grows serious. In the night, all alone, open-eyed, she has realized that she is going to die. She says nothing till evening, lying there thinking, her eyes on the ceiling; and in the evening, she detains her husband, she talks quietly, as if she were submitting a bill to him.

—— "Listen," she says, "you will go to-morrow and get a notary. There is one near here, in the rue Saint-Lazare."

—— "Why a notary?" cries M. Rousseau; "we surely haven't come to that!"

But she goes on in her calm, rational way,—

—— "May be! Only it will make me feel easier to know that our affairs are in order. . . . We married, when neither of us had anything, on the plan of holding all our property in common. Now that we have made a little money, I don't want my family to be able to come down on you and plunder you. . . . My sister Agathe isn't so nice to us that I need leave her anything. I would sooner take all with me."

And she sticks to it obstinately; her husband must go to-morrow and get the notary. She questions the latter at length, bent upon having all due precautions taken that the will shall not be contested. When the will is drawn up and signed, she stretches herself out, murmuring, —

—— "Now I shall die content. . . . I had well earned a trip into the country; I can't say I am not sorry to give up going to the country. But you'll go. . . . Promise me, when you retire, to go to the place we picked out; you know, the village where your mother was born, near Melun. . . . It will give me pleasure."

M. Rousseau weeps bitterly. She tries to comfort him; she gives him good advice. If he finds life hard, all by himself, it will be proper for him to marry again; only he must choose a woman of a certain age, because young girls, who marry widowers, marry their money. And she points out a lady of their acquaintance, with whom she would be happy to know that he had made a match.

Then, that very night, she has a frightful death-struggle. She is stifling, asks for air. M. Rousseau, standing at the head of her bed, can only take the dying woman's hand and press it, to tell her he is there, that he will not leave

her. In the morning, she falls into a profound calm; she is very white, with her eyes shut, breathing slowly. Her husband thinks he can go down with Françoise to open the shop. When he comes up again, he finds his wife still very white, stiffened in the same posture; only her eyes have opened. She is dead.

M. Rousseau has been too long expecting to lose her. He does not weep, he is simply fagged out. He goes down again, sees Françoise put up the shop shutters; and, with his own hand, writes on a sheet of paper, "*Closed on account of decease*"; then he sticks this sheet on to the middle shutter with four wafers. Up-stairs, the whole morning is taken up with cleaning and putting the room to rights. Françoise passes a cloth over the floor, takes away the phials, puts a lighted taper and a cup of holy-water near the dead woman; for Adèle's sister is expected, that terrible Agathe who has the tongue of a serpent, and the maid does not want anybody to be able to find fault with her housekeeping. M. Rousseau has sent a clerk to go through with the necessary formalities. He himself goes to the church and discusses at length the funeral tariff. His being in affliction is no reason why he should be cheated. He loved his wife well, and, if she can see him now, he is sure she is

pleased at his bargaining with the curés and undertaker's men. Still, for the sake of the neighborhood, he wishes to have a proper burial. At last, he strikes a bargain: he will give a hundred and sixty francs to the church, and three hundred francs to the undertaker. He calculates that, with the minor expenses, he will not get through under five hundred francs.

When M. Rousseau comes home, he sees Agathe, his sister-in-law, installed by the dead woman's side. Agathe is a tall, lean woman, with red eyes and thin, bluish lips. The couple quarrelled with her three years ago, and have seen nothing of her since. She rises ceremoniously, then kisses her brother-in-law. In the presence of death, all quarrels are made up. Then M. Rousseau, who could not cry this morning, sobs, finding his poor wife white and stiff, her nose still more pinched, her face so shrunken that he hardly recognizes her. Agathe's eyes are dry. She has taken the best armchair, she casts her eyes slowly over the room, as if making a detailed inventory of the furniture. As yet, she has not brought up the question of her interests; but it is plain that she is very anxious, and is wondering whether there is a will.

On the morning of the funeral, at the moment

when the body is to be placed upon the bier, it appears that the undertaker has made a mistake, and sent too short a coffin. His men have to go for another. Meanwhile, the hearse is waiting at the door, the neighborhood is all agog. This is a fresh torment to M. Rousseau. If it could bring his wife back to life again, to keep her so long, it might be. . . . ! At last, poor madame Rousseau is brought down, and the coffin exposed only ten minutes below, in the doorway hung with black. A hundred people, or so, are waiting in the street, — tradespeople of the neighborhood, tenants in the house, friends of the household, a few workmen in overcoats. The procession starts ; M. Rousseau leads the mourning.

And, as the funeral passes, the neighbors cross themselves rapidly, speaking under their breath. It's the stationer's wife, isn't it? that little yellow woman who was nothing but skin and bones. Ah ! well ! she will be better off underground ! But that is the way with us ! business people, very well-to-do, working to enjoy themselves in their old age ! She's going to enjoy herself now, the stationer's wife is ! And the neighbors' wives are of the opinion that M. Rousseau is doing things in very proper fashion, because he walks behind the hearse,

bareheaded, all alone, pale, and his scant hair flying in the wind.

At the church, the priests knock off the ceremony in forty minutes. Agathe, who has taken a seat in the front row, seems to be counting the lighted candles. No doubt, she is thinking that her brother-in-law might have done things with less ostentation; for, after all, if there is no will, and she inherits half the property, she will have to pay her share toward the funeral. The priests say a last orison, the holy-water sprinkler passes from hand to hand, and the people go. Almost every one goes. The three mourning coaches drive up, and the ladies get into them. Behind the hearse, only M. Rousseau is left, still bareheaded, and thirty others, or so, friends who do not dare to slink away. The hearse is hung simply with black drapery fringed with white. The passers-by raise their hats, and pass on quickly.

As M. Rousseau has no family tomb, he has merely got a five years' grant at the Montmartre cemetery, promising himself to buy a perpetual grant later, when he will exhume his wife, to settle her in her home forever.

The hearse stops at the end of the avenue, and the coffin is carried in men's arms among the low tombstones, up to a grave dug in the

soft earth. Those present walk round in silence. Then the priest withdraws, after mumbling twenty words between his teeth. On every hand lie little gardens, closed by ironwork gates, graves decked with carnations, and green trees; the white slabs, in the midst of this verdure, look quite new and gay. M. Rousseau is much struck with one monument, a slender column surmounted by the symbolic urn. That morning a stonecutter had come to bother him with plans; and he thinks of how, when he buys his perpetual grant, he will have just such a column, with that pretty vase, put over his wife's tombstone.

But Agathe leads him away, and, when they have got back to the shop, decides at last to speak about her interests. When she learns that there is a will, she stands up straight and goes, slamming the door. Never will she set foot again in that shanty. M. Rousseau has still, at moments, a great sorrow that chokes him; but what, above all else, stupefies him, makes his head feel empty and his limbs restless, is that the shop is shut on a week-day.

IV

January has been hard. No work, no bread, and no fire in the house. The Morisseaus have been like to die of want. The wife is a washerwoman; the husband, a mason. They live at the Batignolles, in the rue Cardinet, in a dark house that spreads pestilence through the neighborhood. Their room, on the fifth floor, is so dilapidated that the rain comes in through the cracks in the ceiling; but still they would not complain, if their little Charlot, a boy of ten, did not need good food to make a man of him.

The child is puny; a nothing-at-all throws him on beam ends. When he went to school, if he worked hard, trying to learn everything off-hand, he would come home sick. Very intelligent withal, and such a nice little toad, talking beyond his years. On days when they have no bread to give him, his parents cry like fools. The more so that children are dying off like flies, from the top to the bottom of the house, so unwholesome is it.

There is ice to be broken in the streets. Indeed the father has succeeded in getting a job; he clears the gutters with a pickaxe, and in the evening brings home forty sous. While waiting for his house-building work to begin again, it is always something not to starve on.

But, one day, the man comes home to find Charlot in bed. His mother doesn't know what the matter with him is. She had sent him to Courcelles, to his aunt's, who deals in second-hand clothes, to see if he could not get a jacket that would be warmer than his cotton blouse, in which he goes shivering. His aunt had only two old men's overcoats, both of them too big, and the little fellow had come home all of a tremble, with a tipsy look on him, as if he had been drinking. Now he is very red on his pillow, he talks nonsense, he thinks he is playing marbles, and is singing songs.

His mother has hung a tattered piece of a shawl in front of the window, to stop up a broken pane; at the top, there are only two panes left free, which let in the livid gray of the sky. Want has emptied the chest of drawers, all the linen is at the pawnbroker's. One evening they sold a table and two chairs. Charlot used to sleep on the floor; but, since he fell sick, they have given him the bed, and even there he

is very badly off, for the wool in the mattress has been taken, handful by handful, half a pound at a time, to a second-hand dealer, for four or five sous. Now the father and mother sleep in a corner, on a straw mattress that a dog would turn up his nose at.

Meanwhile, both look at Charlot jumping about in bed. What on earth ails the kid, to make him so queer in the head? Like enough, some beast has bitten him, or else he has been given something bad to drink. A neighbor, madame Bonnet, comes in; and, after looking at the boy, says it is chills and fever. She knows all about it, she lost her husband by just such a sickness.

The mother weeps, pressing Charlot in her arms. The father goes out like a madman, and runs for a doctor. He brings one back, very tall and prim looking; he listens at the child's back, he taps him on the chest, without saying a word. Then madame Bonnet must go to her room for pencil and paper, so that he can write his prescription. When he goes, still mute, the mother asks him in a choking voice, —

—— "What is it, sir?"

—— "Pleurisy," he answers curtly, without further explanation.

Then he asks, in his turn, —

——"Is your name down at the bureau of charities?"

——"No, sir. . . . We were well off last summer. It's the winter that has killed us."

——"So much the worse! so much the worse!"

And he promises to return. Madame Bonnet lends twenty sous, to go to the apothecary's. With Morisseau's forty sous they have bought two pounds of beef, some soft coal, and candles. This first night passes off well. They keep up the fire. The sick boy, as if put to sleep by the warmth, has stopped talking; his little hands are burning. Seeing him weighed down by the fever, his parents feel easier; and they are stupefied, next day, in fresh terror, when the physician shakes his head by the bedside, with the wry face of a man who has given up all hope.

For five days there is no change. Charlot sleeps, as if knocked down upon his pillow. In the room the breath of poverty grows stronger, seems to come in with the wind, through the holes in the roofing and window. The second evening, they sold the mother's last chemise; the third, they had to pull out some more handfuls of wool from under the sick boy, to pay the apothecary. Then everything failed them, there was nothing left.

Morisseau is still breaking ice; only his forty sous don't go round as they used to. As this severe cold may kill Charlot, he longs for a thaw, even though he dreads it. When he goes off to work, he is glad to see the streets white; then he thinks of the little boy dying up there, and fervently prays for a ray of sunshine, a bit of spring warmth, to sweep away the snow. If they only had put their name down at the bureau of charities, they would have the doctor and medicines for nothing. The mother has been to the mairie; they answered her that there were too many applications, she must wait. Still, she got some bread tickets; a benevolent lady gave her five francs. Then destitution began once more.

The fifth day, Morisseau brings home his last forty sous. The thaw has come; he has been discharged. Then all is over: the stove stays cold, there is no bread, no more prescriptions are taken to the apothecary's. In the room, trickling with dampness, the father and mother shiver opposite the little boy, who is near his last. Madame Bonnet does not come to see them any more, because she has a tender heart, and it makes her feel too low in her mind. The people of the house hurry quickly past their door. At times, the mother, in a fit

of tears, throws herself upon the bed, kisses the child, as if to relieve his suffering and cure him. The father, stupefied, stays at the window for hours, raising the old shawl, looking at the thaw running in the gutters, the water dripping in big drops from the roofs, and blackening the street. Perhaps it may do Charlot good.

One morning, the doctor announces that he shall not return. The child is given up.

—— "This damp weather has finished him," he says.

Morisseau shakes his fist at the sky. So all weathers are death to poor people! It froze, and that did no good; it thaws, and that is worse still. If his wife would agree, they would light a bushel of charcoal, and all three go off together. It would be sooner over.

Yet the mother has gone back to the mairie; the people there have promised to send them aid, and they are waiting. What a frightful day! A black chill falls from the ceiling; one corner is dripping with rain; they have to put a pail there to catch the drops. They have eaten nothing since the day before; the child has only drunk a cup of herb tea that the janitor's wife brought up. The father sits at the table, his head in his hands, in a sort of stupor, with a buzzing in his ears. At every sound of

steps, the mother runs to the door, thinks it is, at last, the promised aid. Six o'clock strikes; nothing has come. The twilight is muddy, slow and ghastly as a death-agony.

Suddenly, in the deepening darkness, Charlot stammers out some confused words, —

—— "Mamma . . . mamma . . ."

His mother comes to him, feels a strong breath upon her face. She hears nothing more; she vaguely makes out the child, his head thrown back, his neck stiffened. She shrieks, half crazed, imploring, —

—— "Light! quick, some light! . . . My Charlot, speak to me!"

There are no more candles. In her hurry she scratches some matches, breaks them between her fingers. Then, with trembling hands, she feels of the child's face.

—— "Oh! my God! he is dead! . . . Say, Morisseau, he is dead!"

The father raises his head, blinded by the darkness.

—— "Well, then! what would you have? He's dead. . . . It's better so."

At the mother's sobbing, madame Bonnet has made up her mind to come with her lamp. Then, as the two women are making Charlot tidy, a knock is heard: it is the aid, come at

last; ten francs, some bread tickets, and a bit of meat. Morisseau gives an imbecile laugh, saying that they always miss the train at the bureau of charities.

And what a poor child's corpse, thin, light as a feather! You might have laid a sparrow upon the mattress, killed by the snow and picked up in the street, and it would not have made a smaller heap!

Meanwhile, madame Bonnet, who has grown very obliging again, explains that it will not bring Charlot back to life, to fast by his side. She offers to go after some bread and meat, adding that she will also fetch some candles. They let her go. When she comes back, she sets the table with sausages, hot and hot; and the Morisseaus, famished as they are, eat greedily beside the dead boy, whose little white face is just visible in the dim light. The stove roars, they are very comfortable. At moments, the mother's eyes grow wet. Great tears drop down upon her bread. How warm Charlot would be! and how he would have liked to eat some sausage!

Madame Bonnet insists upon waking with them. About one, when Morisseau has at last fallen asleep, his head resting on the foot of the bed, the two women make some

coffee. Another neighbor, a seamstress of eighteen, is asked in; and she brings the bottoms of a bottle of brandy, so as to stand treat to something. Then the three women sip their coffee, talking in an undertone, telling stories of extraordinary deaths; little by little, their voices are raised, their tittle-tattle takes in a larger field, they chat about the house, about the neighborhood, about a crime committed in the rue Nollet. And, now and then, the mother gets up, goes to take a look at Charlot, as if to make sure that he has not moved.

The declaration not having been made that evening, they have to keep the little body all the next day. They have only one room; they live with Charlot, eat and sleep with him. At moments they forget him; then, when they find him there, it is like losing him over again.

At last, on the next day but one, the coffin is brought, no bigger than a toy box, four boards roughly planed, furnished by the administration, after verifying their certificate of indigence. And all aboard! they set out for the church on the run. Behind Charlot comes the father, with two comrades he has picked up on the way; then the mother, madame Bonnet, and the other neighbor, the seamstress. These people flounder through the mud up to mid-leg. It does

not rain, but the fog is so thick that it drenches their clothes. At the church, the ceremony is hurried through; and they start off again over the muddy pavement.

The cemetery is at the devil, outside the fortifications. They pass down the avenue de Saint-Ouen, through the barrier, and get there at last. It is a vast enclosure, a plot of waste land, shut in by white walls. Weeds grow there; the ground, often dug up, is all in humps; while, at the farther end, grow a row of meagre trees, soiling the sky with their black branches.

The funeral moves slowly forward over the soft ground. Now it rains, and they have to wait in the shower for an old priest, who at last makes up his mind to venture forth from a little chapel. Charlot is to sleep at the bottom of the common trench. The field is strewed with crosses overturned by the wind, with wreaths rotted by the rain; a field of wretchedness and mourning, devastated, trampled down, sweating with its overmeasure of dead bodies, heaped up by the hunger and cold of the suburbs.

It is over. The earth is tossed back, Charlot is at the bottom of the hole; and his parents go, without having been able to kneel down in the liquid mud into which their feet sink. Outside, as it is still raining, Morisseau, who

has three francs left, of the ten francs from the bureau of charities, invites his comrades and the women to take something at a wine shop. They sit down to table, they drink two litres, they eat a piece of Brie cheese. Then the comrades, in their turn, stand two more litres. When the company get back to Paris, they are very gay.

V

Jean-Louis Lacour is seventy. He was born at la Courteille, a hamlet of a hundred and fifty souls, an out-of-the-way spot in the wildest sort of country. He has been once in his life to Angers, which is forty-one miles distant; but he was so young that he does not remember it. He has three children, — two sons, Antoine and Joseph, and a daughter, Catherine. The last was married; then her husband died, and she returned to her father's with a little boy of twelve, Jacquinet. The family lives on from seven to nine acres; just enough to give them bread, and let them not go quite naked. When they drink wine, they have sweated for it.

La Courteille is at the end of a valley, with woods on every side, that shut it in and hide it from view. There is no church, the village is too poor. The curé of les Cormiers comes over to say mass; and, as the road is five good miles, he comes only once a fortnight. The houses, about twenty ramshackle hovels, are strung along the highway. Hens scratch on

the dunghills before the doors. When a stranger goes by, the women stretch their necks; while the children, rolling on the ground in the sun, scamper off in the midst of frightened flocks of geese.

Never has Jean-Louis been sick. He is tall and knotty as an oak. The sun has dried him up, has baked and cracked his skin; he has turned to the color, the roughness and tranquillity of a tree. In growing old, he has lost his tongue. He has done with speaking, finding it useless. He walks with long, obstinate strides, with the peaceful strength of an ox.

Last year, he still was stronger than his sons; he would keep the hardest jobs for himself, silent in the fields, which seemed to know him and tremble. But one day, two months ago, his limbs gave way all of a sudden, and he lay for two hours across a furrow, like a felled trunk. Next day, he tried to go to work again, but his arms had gone off, the soil would no longer obey him. His sons shake their heads. His daughter tries to keep him at home. He sticks it out stubbornly, and they have Jacquinet go with him, so that the child can cry out, if his grandfather falls down.

—— "What are you doing there, lazybones?" asks Jean-Louis of the youngster. "At your age, I was earning my bread."

——"I'm tending you, grandfather," answers the child.

This gives the old man a shock. He says no more. In the evening, he goes to bed, and does not get up again. When his sons and daughter go to the fields, next day, they step in to take a look at their father, as they do not hear him moving. They find him stretched out on his bed, with open eyes, as if in thought. His skin is so hard and tanned that you can't even tell the color of his complaint.

——"Well, father, out of sorts?"

He gives a grunt, he says no with his head.

——"Then you're not coming; we'll go without you?"

Yes, he motions them to go without him. The harvest has begun, every arm is needed. Like enough, if they were to lose a morning, a sudden storm might carry away the sheaves. Even Jacquinet follows his mother and uncles. Old Lacour is left alone. In the evening, when his children come home, he is in the same place, still on his back, with his eyes open and that look of his, as if in thought.

——"So, father, you're no better?"

No, no better. He grunts, he shakes his head. What under the sun can they do to him? Catherine suggests putting some wine to boil, with

herbs in it; but it is too strong, it all but kills him. Joseph says they will see to-morrow, and they all go to bed.

The next day, before going to harvest, the sons and daughters stop a minute, standing by his bedside. Decidedly the old man is sick. Never before has he stayed on his back like that. Perhaps they really ought to call in a doctor. The trouble is that they will have to go to Rougemont; a good sixteen miles there, and sixteen miles back, that makes thirty-two. They would lose a whole day. The old man, who is listening to his children, fidgets and seems to be getting angry. He doesn't need any doctor; it does no good, and it costs money.

—— "You don't want one?" asks Antoine. "Then we'll go to work?"

Of course they must go to work. They wouldn't make him any better by staying there, would they? The soil needs looking after more than he. And three days pass by; the children go to the fields every morning. Jean-Louis does not move, all alone, drinking out of a jug when he is thirsty. He is like one of those old horses that fall down in a corner from weariness, and are left to die. He has worked for sixty years; he may as well go, seeing that he is no longer good for anything, except to take up room and bother people.

His children themselves feel no great sorrow. Tilling the soil has made them resigned to these things; they are too near to it to owe it a grudge for taking the old man. A look at him in the morning, a look in the evening; they can do no more. If their father should pick up again, after all, it would prove that he was plaguy stoutly put together. If he dies, it will show that he had death in his body; and everybody knows that, when you have death in your body, nothing will drive it out; not signs of the cross any more than medicines. A cow, now, you can do something for.

In the evening, Jean-Louis gives his children an inquisitive glance about the harvest. When he hears them count up the sheaves and congratulate themselves on the fine weather, his eyes sparkle. Once more, they talk of going for the doctor; but the old man loses his temper, and they are afraid of killing him all the sooner if they thwart him. He only asks to see the district constable, an old comrade. Old Nicolas is his senior, for he was seventy-five last Candlemas. He is straight as a poplar. He comes and gravely sits down beside Jean-Louis. Jean-Louis, who has lost his tongue, looks at him with his little washed-out eyes. Old Nicolas looks at him, too, having

nothing to say. And the two old men sit there, face to face, for an hour, without uttering a word, no doubt remembering things far away, in their bygone days. That evening, when his children come home from harvest, they find Jean-Louis dead, stretched out on his back, stiff, and his eyes in the air.

Yes, the old man has died without moving a limb. He has breathed his last straight before him, one breath more in the wide country. Like the beasts that hide themselves and submit, he did not even trouble a neighbor, he did his little business all alone.

—— "Father is dead," says Joseph, calling the others.

And they all, Antoine, Catherine, Jacquinet, repeat, —

—— "Father is dead."

They are not surprised. Jacquinet stretches out his neck in curiosity; the woman pulls out her handkerchief, the two young men walk about, saying nothing, their grave faces turning paler under their tan. He had lasted pretty well; he was rugged, their old father was! And this thought comforts his children; they are proud of the family ruggedness.

They watch with their father up to eleven, then they all give way to sleep; and Jean-

Louis sleeps alone, with his close-shut face, which seems still to be thinking.

At daybreak, Joseph sets out for les Cormiers, to notify the curé. Meanwhile, as there are still some sheaves to be brought in, Antoine and Catherine go to the fields just the same, leaving the body in Jacquinet's care. The little boy finds the time pass heavily in the old man's company, seeing that he does not even stir; and he goes out, now and then, into the street, throws stones at some sparrows, looks on at a pedler spreading out some silk neckerchiefs before two neighbors' wives; then, when he remembers his grandfather, he runs in again, makes sure that he has not moved, and cuts away once more, to see two dogs fight.

As the door has been left open, the hens come in, walk round quietly, rummaging on the trodden ground with their bills. A red cock stands erect on his feet, stretches out his neck, rounds his live-coal of an eye, anxious about this body, whose presence there he cannot explain; he is a prudent and sagacious cock, who, no doubt, knows that the old man is not used to lie abed after sunrise; and he ends by crowing his sonorous clarion note, singing the old man's death, while the hens go out again, one by one, clucking and pecking the ground.

The curé from les Cormiers cannot come till five. Ever since morning, you could hear the cartwright sawing deal boards and driving in nails. Those who do not know the news say, "How? can Jean-Louis be dead!" because the la Courteille folk know those sounds well.

Antoine and Catherine have got back, the harvest is over; they cannot say they are disappointed, for the grain has not been so fine for ten years.

The whole family are waiting for the curé, and turn their hands to something, to keep up their patience. Catherine puts the soup on the fire, Joseph draws some water, they send Jacquinet to see if the hole has been dug in the graveyard. At last, but not before six, the curé arrives. He is in a spring tilt-cart, with a young ragamuffin to act as clerk. He gets out at the Lacours' door, takes his stole and surplice out of a newspaper; then puts them on, saying, —

—— "Let us be quick; I must be back by seven."

But nobody is in a hurry. They have to go for two neighbors, who are to carry the deceased on the old black wood stretcher. As they are, at last, on the point of starting, Jacquinet comes

running up, and screams out that the hole is not finished yet, but that they can come along, all the same.

Then the priest goes first, reading Latin out of a book. The little clerk who follows him holds an old holy-water vase of embossed copper, into which he has dipped a sprinkler. It is only in the middle of the village that another small boy comes out from the barn where mass is said every fortnight, and puts himself at the head of the procession, holding up a cross stuck on the end of a stick. The family walk behind the body; little by little, all the village folk join them; a tail of little ragamuffins, bareheaded, their shirts all unbuttoned, brings up in the rear.

The graveyard is at the other end of la Courteille. So the neighbors set down the stretcher three times; they stand puffing, while the funeral waits; then they go on again. You hear the clomping of their wooden shoes on the hard ground. When they get there, the hole, as Jacquinet said, is not ready; the gravedigger is still in it, and you see him duck down, then reappear, at regular intervals, with every shovelful of earth.

A simple hedge runs round the graveyard. Brambles grow there, to which the boys come, of September evenings, to eat blackberries. It

is a garden in the open fields. At one end are enormous currant-bushes; a pear-tree in one corner has grown like an oak; a short avenue of lindens casts a shade in the middle, where the old men smoke their pipes in summer. The silence is all a-tremble with life; the sap of this rich soil runs red with the blood of the poppies.

They have set down the bier beside the hole. The small boy who carried the cross has planted it at the dead man's feet, while the priest, standing at his head, keeps on reading Latin from his book. But those present are engrossed, above all, with watching the gravedigger at his work. They surround the grave, follow his shovel with their eyes; and, when they turn round, the curé is gone with the two boys; only the family are left waiting patiently.

At last, the grave is dug.

—— "It's deep enough, you bet!" cries one of the peasants who carried the body.

And every one helps let down the coffin. Old Lacour can take his comfort in that hole. He knows the soil, and the soil knows him. They will get on well together. Here it is sixty years since it made this appointment with him, on the day when he first struck his pickaxe into it. Their love was to end so; the earth was to take

him and keep him; and how good a rest! He will hear only the light feet of the birds bending the blades of grass. No one will walk over his head; he will stay at home, without any one's disturbing him. It is sunlit death, sleep without end in the peace of the fields.

His children have drawn near. Catherine, Antoine, Joseph, take a handful of earth and throw it upon the old man. Jacquinet, who has picked some poppies, throws his nosegay, too. Then the family go home to their soup, the cattle come in from the meadows, the sun sets. A warm night puts the village to sleep.

THE COQUEVILLE SPREE

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I

COQUEVILLE is a little village stuck in a cleft in the rocks, five miles from Grandport. A fine sand beach stretches out in front of the hovels, which cling half way up the face of the bluff, like shells left there by the tide. When you climb the heights to the left of Grandport, you can see the yellow sheet of beach quite plainly to the westward, like a wave of gold-dust that might have flowed out from the gaping cleft of the rock; and with good eyes you can even make out the houses, like rust spots on the stone, throwing streaks of bluish smoke from their chimneys up to the crest of the huge headland that bars the sky.

It is an out-of-the-way hole. Coqueville has never succeeded in reaching the figure of two hundred inhabitants. The gorge which opens upon the sea, and at the threshold of which the village lies, runs back into the land by such abrupt turns and steep ascents that it is all but impossible to pass through it on wheels. This

cuts off all communication and isolates the place, in which you seem to be hundreds of miles away from the neighboring hamlets. The inhabitants have communication with Grandport by water only. They are nearly all fishermen, who make their livelihood out of the ocean and take their fish there every day in their boats. The large commission house of Dufeu buys their fish in bulk. Old Dufeu has been dead some years, but the widow Dufeu carries on the business; she has merely taken a clerk, M. Mouchel, a big sandy-haired devil whose business it is to beat the shore and bargain with the fishermen. This M. Mouchel is the only connecting link between Coqueville and civilization.

Coqueville deserves an historian. It seems certain that, in the night of ages, the village was founded by the Mahés, a family which came to establish itself there and throve sturdily at the foot of the bluff. These Mahés must have prospered at first, always intermarrying among themselves; for you find nobody but Mahés there for centuries. Then, under Louis XIII, a Floche appeared. No one quite knows whence he came. He married a Mahé, and from that moment this phenomenon was noticeable: the Floches throve in their turn and multiplied to

such an extent that at last they gradually absorbed the Mahés, whose numbers diminished while their fortunes passed into the hands of the new-comers. No doubt the Floches brought in fresh blood, more vigorous organs, a constitution better adapted to those hard conditions of high wind and open sea. At all events, they now own Coqueville.

It may be conceived that this shifting of numbers and property was not accomplished without some terrific shocks. The Mahés and Floches hate each other. There is an enmity of centuries between them. In spite of their downfall, the Mahés still nurture a pride as of ancient conquerors. After all, they were the founders, the ancestors. They speak with contempt of the first Floche, a beggar, a vagabond whom they took in from compassion, and to whom it will be their eternal despair ever to have given one of their daughters. According to their account, this Floche begot only a progeny of rakes and thieves, who spent their nights in siring children and their days in hankering after legacies. And there are no insults which they do not hurl at the powerful tribe of Floche, bitten with the bitter rage of those ruined and decimated nobles who see a swarming bourgeoisie masters of their incomes and châteaux.

Of course the Floches, on their side, take their triumph saucily. They are in possession, and this makes them insolent. Continually jeering at the ancient race of Mahé, they swear they will hunt them out of the village if they do not bow the neck. In their eyes they are a set of starving rascals who, instead of draping themselves in their rags, had much better mend them. So Coqueville is a prey to two ferocious factions, something like a hundred and thirty inhabitants bent upon annihilating the fifty others, for the simple reason that they have the upper hand. The struggle between two empires has no other history.

Among the squabbles that have lately upset Coqueville are cited the famous enmity between the brothers Fouasse and Tupain and the noisy altercations in the Rouget household. You must know that in old times every inhabitant was given a nickname, which has now grown to be a real surname; for it was impossible to keep one's bearings amidst all the crossings of Mahés with Floches. Rouget surely had a red-haired ancestor; as for Fouasse and Tupain, no one ever knew how they got their names, many surnames having lost all rational meaning in the course of time. Now, old Françoise, a strapping old woman of eighty who was still

alive, had had Fouasse by a Mahé; then, after being widowed, she married a second time with a Floche, and bore Tupain. Hence the two brothers' mutual hatred; all the more that this hatred was kept alive by considerations of heritage. At the Rougets' the family pounded each other to a jelly because Rouget accused his wife of being false to him with a Floche, the big Brisemotte, a dark, stalwart fellow upon whom he had twice fallen with a knife, bellowing that he would rip up his belly for him. Rouget was a sinewy little man, and very hot tempered.

But what most excited Coqueville about this time was neither Rouget's fits of fury nor the wranglings between Tupain and Fouasse. An astonishing rumor went the rounds: Delphin, a young chap of twenty and a Mahé, had dared to fall in love with the beautiful Margot, daughter of La Queue, the richest of the Floches and mayor of the place. This La Queue was verily a considerable personage. He was called La Queue because his father, under Louis Philippe, had been the last to tie up his hair with a string, sticking to the fashions of his younger days with an old man's obstinacy. Now, La Queue owned one of the two large fishing boats in Coqueville, the *Zephyr*, —

the better one by far, for she was still quite new and stanch at sea. The other large boat, the *Whale*, a rotten old craft, belonged to Rouget, whose hands were Delphin and Fouasse, whereas La Queue had Tupain and Brisemotte. These last two never ran dry of contemptuous laughter at the *Whale*, calling her a wooden clog that would founder under a sea some day like a handful of mud. And when La Queue heard that that beggar of a Delphin, the cabin boy of the *Whale*, had the cheek to be loafing round his daughter, he gave her a couple of very particular cuffs on the ear, just to warn her that she should never be a Mahé's wife. At this Margot cried out in a fury that she would pass on the pair of cuffs to Delphin if ever he should have the impudence to come rubbing up against her skirts. It was annoying to be cuffed for a young man whom she had never so much as looked in the face. Margot at sixteen was strong as a man and handsome as a lady; she had the name of being pretty high and mighty and particularly hard on lovers. Considering all of which, the story of the two cuffs, of Delphin's presumption and Margot's rage, the endless gossip in Coqueville is quite sufficiently explained.

Yet certain persons did say that Margot was

not so very furious, at bottom, at seeing Delphin hover round her. This Delphin was a little sandy-haired fellow, with a complexion tanned by the sea, and a shock of curly hair that came down to his eyes and over his neck. And very strong, with all his slim waist, — quite up to thrashing any one three times his size. It was told of him that he would sometimes run away and stay over night at Grandport. This gave him the reputation of a rake with the girls, who would accuse him among themselves of seeing life, — a vague expression in which they included all sorts of unknown pleasures. Whenever Margot spoke of Delphin, she would get too excited. He would smile in his sly way and look at her out of his narrow, sparkling eyes, without caring the least bit in the world for her disdain nor her outbursts of anger. He would pass in front of her door and creep along by the thorn hedges, watching her for hours together with the patience and suppleness of a cat stalking a titmouse; and when she suddenly discovered him behind her skirts, — so close at times that she guessed he was there by the warmth of his breath, — he did not run away, but gave her a tender, melancholy look that left her abashed and choking, so that she could not find her

anger till he was gone. Surely, if her father were to see her, he would box her ears again. It could not last so. But she might swear as much as she pleased that Delphin should some day have the pair of cuffs she had promised him, she never seized the right opportunity to give them, when he was there; which made people say she ought not to talk so much about it, as the upshot would be that she kept the cuffs for herself.

No one, however, supposed that she could ever be Delphin's wife. People saw in her case the weakness of a coquettish girl. As for a marriage between the most beggarly of the Mahés, a fellow who had not six shirts to his back to set up housekeeping on, and the mayor's daughter, the richest heiress of the Floches, that would have been thought simply monstrous. Some invidious tongues hinted that she might keep company with him all the same, but that she certainly would not marry him. A rich girl can enjoy herself in her own way; only, when she has a head on her shoulders, she does not make a fool of herself. Upon the whole, all Coqueville was interested in the business, curious to see what turn matters would take. Would Delphin get his two cuffs? or would Margot let him kiss her on the cheek in

some hole in the bluff? It remained to be seen. Some were for the cuffs, some for the kisses. Coqueville was in a state of revolution.

Only two persons in the village, the curé and the constable, belonged neither to the Mahés nor the Floches. The constable was a tall, spare man whose name nobody knew, but who was called the Emperor, no doubt because he had served under Charles X; he did not really exercise any serious supervision over the district, which was all bare rock and waste heath. A sub-prefect whose protégé he was had given him this sinecure, in which he lived in peace on a very small salary. As for the abbé Radiguet, he was one of the priestly pure in heart whom bishops bury in some out-of-the-way hole to get rid of them. He lived, good man that he was, as one who had turned peasant again, digging in his little garden which he had reclaimed from the rock, smoking his pipe, and watching his salads grow. His one failing was a fondness for good living, which he could not cultivate with any of the refinements of the table, reduced as he was to doting on mackerel and drinking cider, at times more than was good for him. Upon the whole, he was the father of his parishioners, who would come to hear mass from time to time to please him.

But the time came when curé and constable had to take sides, after long succeeding in remaining neutral. Now, the Emperor was for the Mahés, whereas the abbé Radiguet backed up the Floches. Hence arose complications. As the Emperor lived a life of leisure from morning till night and would get tired of counting the boats that put out from Grandport, he took it into his head to pry into all sorts of village matters. Being a partisan of the Mahés, from secret instincts in favor of social conservatism, he upheld Fouasse against Tupain, tried to catch Rouget's wife *in flagrante* with Brisemotte, and above all shut his eyes whenever he saw Delphin slip into Margot's courtyard. The worst of it was that this led to some lively squabbles between the Emperor and his natural superior, mayor La Queue. As he was imbued with a profound respect for discipline, the former would listen to the other's reprimands, and then go his own way as before; which disorganized the public authorities of Coqueville. You could not pass by the shed dignified by the name of mayor's office without being deafened by the noise of a quarrel. On the other hand, the abbé Radiguet rallied under the banner of the triumphant Floches, who overwhelmed him with superb mackerel; and he secretly encour-

aged the Rouget woman's resistance, and threatened Margot with hell-fire if she should ever let Delphin touch her with the tip of his finger. The upshot of it all was complete anarchy: the army in a state of mutiny against the civil power, religion winking complacently at the pleasures of the bourgeoisie, an entire population of a hundred and eighty-five souls devouring one another in a cranny, in the face of the boundless sea and the infinitude of the sky.

Alone in the midst of this topsyturvied Coqueville, Delphin stuck to his lover's smile, caring not a whit for the rest, so long as Margot was for him. He was setting snares for her as you do for rabbits. Being very steady, with all his apparent flightiness, he wanted to have the curé marry them, so that the pleasure might last forever.

At last Margot raised her hand one evening in a footpath where he was dogging her steps. But she stopped short, turning red in the face; for he did not wait for the blow, but grasped the hand that threatened him and was kissing it furiously.

As she stood there trembling, he whispered,—

—— "I love you; will you have me?"

—— "Never!" she cried, deeply offended,

He shrugged his shoulders; then said quietly and tenderly, —

—— "Now, don't say that. . . . We shall get on very well together. You'll see how good it is."

II

THE weather that Sunday was appalling; it was one of those sudden September storms that beat upon the rocky shores of Grandport in terrible hurricanes. At nightfall Coqueville espied a ship in distress running before the wind; but darkness was setting in, and there could be no thought of putting out to her aid. Ever since the day before, the *Zephyr* and the *Whale* had lain at their moorings between two banks of granite in the little natural harbor to the left of the beach. Neither La Queue nor Rouget dared put out to sea. The worst of it was that M. Mouchel, representing the widow Dufeu, had taken the trouble to come in person on Saturday, to promise them a premium if they would bestir themselves in earnest: he was short of fish, and complaints had come in from the market. So Coqueville was grumbling, in high dudgeon, as it went to its bed amid the gusts of rain on Sunday evening. It was the everlasting story: orders would come in when the sea

kept its fish to itself. And the whole village talked of that ship they had seen pass by in the hurricane, which must now be sleeping at the bottom of the sea.

Next day, Monday, the sky was still dark. The sea still ran high, roaring as if it could never calm down again, although the gale had abated. It stopped wholly, but the waves kept up their furious tossing. Nevertheless the two boats put out in the afternoon. The *Zephyr* put back again about four, having caught nothing. While the two hands, Tupain and Brisemotte, were mooring her in the little harbor, La Queue stood on the beach, shaking his fist in exasperation at the ocean. And M. Mouchel was waiting! Margot was there together with half Coqueville, watching the last great swell of the storm, sharing her father's grudge against the sea and sky.

——"Where can the *Whale* be?" asked some one.

——"Over there behind the point," said La Queue. "If that old hulk gets back whole to-day, she'll be in luck."

He was full of contempt. Then he gave out that it was all very well for the Mahés to risk their skin in that way: when you haven't a red sou, you might as well go and die. He had rather break his promise to M. Mouchel.

Meanwhile Margot was watching the point of rocks behind which the *Whale* was.

——"Father," she asked at last, "have they caught anything?"

——"They?" cried he. "Nothing at all!"

He calmed down and added more quietly, seeing that the Emperor was grinning,—

——"I don't know whether they've caught anything or not, but as they never do . . ."

——"Maybe they've caught something to-day, all the same," said the Emperor maliciously. "Such things have been known to happen."

La Queue was about to reply angrily. But the abbé Radiguet, who had just joined them, pacified him. The abbé had caught sight of the *Whale* from the flat church roof; the boat seemed to be giving chase to some big fish. This news threw Coqueville into a fever of excitement. There were Mahés and Floches in the crowd gathered on the beach; some longed to have the boat come in with a miraculous draught of fishes, others sent up prayers that she might return empty.

Margot stood there erect, never taking her eyes off the sea.

——"There they are," she said simply.

It was true; a black spot came in sight round the point.

All looked. It was like a cork dancing on the water. The Emperor could not even see the black spot. You had to be from Coqueville to make out the *Whale* and her crew at that distance.

——"See!" said Margot, who had the best eyes of the whole coast, "Fouasse and Rouget are rowing. . . . The young one's standing up in the bow."

She called Delphin "the young one" so as not to mention him by name. From that minute they followed the boat's course, trying to account for her strange movements. As the curé said, she seemed to be giving chase to some fish which was swimming before her as for dear life. They thought it extraordinary. The Emperor guessed their net had been carried away. But La Queue cried out that they were a pack of do-nothings having some fun. They surely could not be fishing for seal! All the Floches laughed heartily at this joke, while the annoyed Mahés declared Rouget to be a brick, all the same, risking his skin where others, at the least capful of wind, preferred to come ashore. The abbé Radiguet had to interpose again, for there were hard knocks in the wind.

——"What's the matter with them?" said Margot suddenly. "There they are, off again."

The fight stopped before it had begun, and all eyes were fixed upon the horizon. The *Whale* was once more hidden behind the point. This time La Queue himself grew anxious. He could not explain such manœuvres. The fear that Rouget might really be in the way of catching some fish made him beside himself. No one left the beach, although nothing of interest had turned up yet. They stayed on for nearly two hours, still waiting for the boat, which would appear from time to time and then disappear again. At last she stopped appearing at all. La Queue was furious, and, with the atrocious wish in his heart, declared that she must have foundered; and, as Rouget's wife happened to be there with Brisemotte, he looked at the two with a sardonic grin, while he slapped Tupain on the back to console him already for the loss of his brother Fouasse. But he stopped laughing when he saw his daughter Margot, silent and on tiptoe, with her eyes fixed upon the distance. Perhaps it was for Delphin.

——"What are you about there?" he growled. "Will you cut home? . . . Look out, Margot!"

She did not stir. Then, all of a sudden,—

——"Ah! there they are!"

There was a shout of surprise. Margot, with her good eyes, swore she could not see a soul in the boat. Neither Rouget, nor Fouasse, nor anybody! The *Whale* was drifting before the wind as if she had been abandoned, putting about every minute and rocking lazily on the waves. Luckily a westerly breeze had sprung up and was blowing her in toward shore, but with singular caprices which tossed her from right to left. Then all Coqueville came down to the beach. Some called the others; there was not a girl left in the houses to mind the soup. It was a disaster, something inexplicable, the strangeness of which turned their heads. Marie, Rouget's wife, thought best, after a moment's reflection, to burst into tears. Tupain did not succeed in putting on a look of affliction. All the Mahés were wild with grief, while the Floches tried to behave decently. Margot sat down as if her legs had given way under her.

——"What are you up to there again?" shouted La Queue as he found her between his feet.

——"I'm tired," she answered simply.

She turned her face to the sea, with her

cheeks between her hands, shading her eyes with the tips of her fingers, and looked fixedly at the boat as it rocked still more lazily on the waves, like a light-hearted boat that had drunk more than was good for it.

Meanwhile suppositions went on at a great rate. Perhaps the three men had fallen overboard? Only, all three at once; that seemed queer. La Queue would have had them believe that the *Whale* had gone to pieces like a rotten egg; but the boat was still afloat, and people shrugged their shoulders. Then, as if the three men were really lost, he remembered that he was mayor and spoke of formalities.

——"Get out!" cried the Emperor. "Folks don't die so stupidly as that! If they'd fallen overboard, that little Delphin would be here by this time!"

All Coqueville had to agree that Delphin swam like a herring. But then, where could the three men be? They screamed, "I tell you it's so! . . . I tell you it isn't! . . . Fool! . . . Fool yourself!" And matters got to the pitch of an exchange of blows. The abbé Radiguet had to make a conciliatory appeal, while the Emperor shoved people this way and that to establish order once more. Meanwhile the boat did not hurry herself, but

continued to dance before the company. She waltzed, she seemed to be making fun of the crowd. The tide washed her in toward shore, saluting the land in a series of long, rhythmic courtesies. A crazy boat, and no mistake.

Margot, with her cheeks in her hands, still kept up her watch. A skiff was just putting out from shore to go and meet the *Whale*. It was Brisemotte who was so impatient, as if he could not wait to give Rouget's wife some definite assurance. From that moment all Coqueville became engrossed in the skiff. Voices were raised. Well! could he see anything? The *Whale* drifted nearer, with her mysterious, jeering air. At last they saw him stand up and look into the boat, after managing to get hold of one of her hawsers. Every one held his breath. But suddenly he burst out laughing. This was a surprise. What was he laughing at?

——"What do you see? what is it?" they called out furiously to him.

He did not answer, but only laughed the harder. He made signs as if to tell them that they would see. Then, after making the *Whale* fast to the skiff, he towed her in; and an unlooked-for spectacle struck Coqueville dumb.

The three men, Rouget, Delphin, and Fou-

asse, were lying blissfully on their backs in the bottom of the boat, snoring with clenched fists, dead drunk. Between them lay a small cask, staved in; a full cask which they must have picked up out of the water and the contents of which they had tasted. It was doubtless very good, for they had drunk it all up, except about a litre's worth, which had run out into the boat and got mixed with the sea water.

—— "Oh! the hog!" cried Rouget's wife brutally, stopping her snivelling.

—— "Well! a nice catch theirs is!" said La Queue, affecting profound disgust.

—— "Pshaw!" replied the Emperor, "folks catch what they can. They've fished up a cask anyhow, while some folks haven't caught anything at all."

The mayor held his tongue, much vexed. Coqueville was in an uproar. They saw it all now. When boats are drunk, they dance, just like men; and this one had her belly full of liquor, sure enough. Ah! the villain, what a jag! She zigzagged on the ocean like a drunk-and-incapable who couldn't tell his own house. And Coqueville laughed and was angry, the Mahés calling it fun, whereas the Floches thought it disgusting. They crowded round the *Whale*, stretching out their necks

and opening their eyes wide, to see those three fellows sleeping there, making a show of their holiday faces, without a suspicion of the crowd that was bending over them. The insults and laughter did not trouble them much. Rouget could not hear his wife accuse him of drinking up everything. Fouasse did not feel the sly kicks his brother Tupain kept giving him in the ribs. As for Delphin, he was pretty as a picture when he had been drinking, with his fair hair, pink cheeks, and his face drowned in rapture. Margot got up and was now looking at the young one in silence, with a hard expression in her eye.

——"They must be put to bed!" cried a voice.

But just then Delphin opened his eyes. He looked round at the people as if highly delighted. He was questioned on every hand, with a vehemence that rather stunned him, all the more for his being full as a tick.

——"Well! what's the matter?" he stammered out. "It's a little cask. . . . There ain't any fish. So then, we caught a little cask."

This was all that could be got out of him. He only added, with every sentence,—

——"It was mighty good."

——"But what was there in the cask?" they all asked furiously.

——"Oh! I don't know. . . . It was mighty good."

By this time Coqueville was burning to know all about it. Every one stuck his nose down into the boat, sniffing with all his might. According to the unanimous opinion, it smelt of liquor; only no one knew what liquor. The Emperor, who flattered himself that he had tasted of everything a man could drink, said he would see. He gravely took a little of the liquid that was in the bottom of the boat in the hollow of his hand. The crowd was suddenly hushed. They were waiting. But the Emperor shook his head after swallowing a mouthful, as if he were not sure yet. He tasted twice, in greater and greater perplexity, looking anxious and surprised. He had to own up, —

——"I don't know. . . . It's odd. . . . If it weren't for the salt water, I could tell; no doubt about it. . . . My word of honor, it's very odd!"

They looked at one another. They were struck by the Emperor himself not daring to give an opinion. Coqueville looked at the empty cask with respect.

——"It's mighty good," said Delphin once more, as if he did not care a rap for anybody.

Then he pointed out to sea with a comprehensive sweep of his arm and added,—

——"If you want any, there's more of 'em. . . . I saw a lot o' little casks . . . little casks . . . . little casks. . . ."

And he seemed as if he would rock himself to sleep with this refrain, which he kept humming, looking tenderly at Margot the while. He had just noticed her. She, in a fury, made as if she would box his ears for him; but he did not even shut his eyes, waiting there for the cuff without changing his tender gaze.

The abbé Radiguet, too, puzzled by this unknown delicacy, dipped his finger into the boat and sucked it. Like the Emperor, he shook his head: no, he didn't know what that was; it was very astonishing. They could agree only on one point: the cask must have come from the wreck of the ship in distress which was signalled on Sunday evening. English vessels often brought cargoes of liquor and fine wines to Grandport.

Little by little the daylight faded, and the crowd withdrew into the dark; but La Queue stayed behind, absorbed, tormented by an idea which he told to no one. He stopped, listen-

ing for the last time to Delphin, who was being carried off and kept repeating in his singsong voice, —

—— "Little casks . . . little casks . . . little casks. . . . If you want any, there's more of 'em!"

III

THE weather changed completely that night. When Coqueville awoke next morning, the sun was shining bright, the sea lay stretched out without a ripple, like a huge piece of green satin. And it was hot, one of those white autumn heats.

La Queue was the first in the village to get up, still conscious of a confused jumble of dreams he had had in the course of the night. He took a long look at the sea, to the right and left. At last he said sulkily that M. Mouchel's orders must be attended to, at any rate. So he set out at once with Tupain and Brisemotte, threatening to fondle Margot on the ribs if she didn't walk straight. But when the *Zephyr* put out from the harbor, and he saw the *Whale* rocking lazily at her moorings, he brightened up a bit, crying out sarcastically, —

—— "To-day, not much! . . . Dowse the glim, Jeanneton, the gentlemen have turned in!"

And as soon as the *Zephyr* was standing out to sea, he let out his nets. He next went to

look at his "jambins," — a sort of elongated hoop-net, used especially for catching the large, spiny lobsters (called langoustes) and the red mullet. But, though the sea was calm, it did not matter how carefully he searched his "jambins" one by one, they were all empty; at the bottom of the last one, as if by way of mockery, he found one small mackerel, which he threw back furiously into the sea. It was a veritable trick of fate. There would come weeks like that, when the fish wouldn't care a damn for Coqueville, and always just when M. Mouchel wanted them. When he drew in his nets an hour later, all he found was a bunch of sea-weed. At this he swore with clenched fists, and all the harder that the sea was one boundless, lazy, dreamy calm, like a sheet of burnished silver beneath the blue sky. The *Zephyr* glided on, slowly and gently, without a roll. La Queue made up his mind to put back again after letting out his nets once more. He would come and see in the afternoon; and he threatened God and all the saints, sacréing abominable oaths.

Meanwhile Rouget, Fouasse, and Delphin were still asleep. They could not be got upon their feet till breakfast-time. They could remember nothing, being only conscious of

having treated themselves to something extraordinary, they did not know what. As they were all three down at the harbor in the afternoon, the Emperor tried to pump them, now that they had come to their senses. It was perhaps a little like brandy with licorice in it; or else rather more like rum, sugared and burnt? They said yes, they said no. The Emperor suspected from their answers that it might have been ratafia; but he would not have sworn to it. Rouget and his men felt too sore round the ribs to go fishing that day. Besides, they knew that La Queue had gone out for nothing in the morning, and spoke of waiting till afternoon before looking at their "jambins." All three sat there on blocks of stone, watching the tide come in, with rounded shoulders and pasty mouths, half asleep.

But all of a sudden Delphin woke up. He jumped up upon the stone with his eyes staring seaward, and cried out, —

—— "Look there, skipper . . . out there!"

—— "What?" asked Rouget, stretching himself.

—— "A cask."

Rouget and Fouasse were on their feet at once, searching the horizon with glistening eyes.

—— "Where is it, young one? where's your cask?" replied the skipper, greatly excited.

—— "Over yonder . . . to the left . . . that black dot."

The others could see nothing. Then Rouget exclaimed with an oath,

—— "By God!"

He had just spied out the cask, the size of a bean on the white water, in a slanting ray of the setting sun; and he ran to the *Whale*, followed by Delphin and Fouasse, who rushed after him, kicking up their heels behind and making the pebbles fly.

As the *Whale* was putting out from the harbor the news spread through Coqueville that a cask had been sighted outside. The women and children set off on the run, screaming, —

—— "A cask! a cask!"

—— "Do you see it? The current is carrying it to Grandport."

—— "Ah! yes, to the left there . . . a cask! Come quick!"

And Coqueville slithered down its rock, the children turning cart-wheels, the women picking up their skirts in their hands, to get down faster. Soon the whole village was on the beach, as on the day before.

Margot showed herself for a minute, then ran

home again as fast as her legs could carry her, to notify her father, who was discussing a report with the Emperor. At last La Queue appeared. He was livid as he said to the constable, —

—— "Shut up! . . . That Rouget sent you to call off my attention. Well! he sha'n't get this one, you'll see."

His rage redoubled when he saw the *Whale* over three hundred yards off, rowing hard toward the black spot that was bobbing up and down in the distance. He shoved Tupain and Brisemotte into the *Zephyr* and put out from port in his turn, repeating, —

——"No, they sha'n't get it; I'll die first."

Then Coqueville had a fine sight, a desperate race between the *Zephyr* and the *Whale*. When the latter saw the other put out from the harbor she realized the danger and spurted ahead at full speed. She might have a start of somewhat over four hundred yards; but it was an even thing, for the *Zephyr* was lighter and faster. The excitement, too, was at its height on the beach. The Mahés and Floches instinctively formed two groups, following with breathless interest the changes of luck in the struggle, each group backing its own boat. At first the *Whale* kept the advantage she had gained at the start; but when the *Zephyr* was well under way she

was seen to be creeping up upon her rival, little by little. Then the *Whale* put on a tremendous spurt and managed to keep her distance for some minutes; but she was again overhauled, the *Zephyr* gaining on her with astonishing speed. From this moment it was plain that the two boats would come alongside somewhere near the cask. The victory would hang upon an accident, upon the least slip.

——"The *Whale!* the *Whale!*" cried the Mahés; but they stopped shouting. Just as the *Whale* was almost touching the cask, the *Zephyr* steered across her bow by a bold manœuvre, throwing the cask over to the left where La Queue caught hold of it with his boat-hook.

——"The *Zephyr!* the *Zephyr!*" howled the Floches.

The Emperor claimed a foul, and there was an interchange of strong language. Margot clapped her hands. The abbé Radiguet, who had strolled down with his breviary, made a profound remark which calmed every one down and threw all into consternation,—

——"Maybe they'll drink it all up, too," he murmured sadly.

Outside, a quarrel had broken out between the *Whale* and the *Zephyr*. Rouget called La Queue a thief, while the latter called him a

good-for-nothing. The men even took up their oars to knock each other down; and it wanted little to turn the adventure into a naval battle. But they agreed to meet on shore, shaking their fists at one another and threatening to empty each other's bellies as soon as they came together.

—— "The low rascals!" grunted Rouget. "The cask is bigger than the one yesterday.... This one's yellow. There must be famous stuff in it."

Then, in despairing accents, —

—— "Let's go and take a look at the hoop-nets. . . . Perhaps there's lobsters in 'em."

And the *Whale* went lumbering off, heading for the point, toward the left.

On board the *Zephyr*, La Queue had to get into a passion to keep Tupain and Brisemotte within bounds about the cask. The boat-hook had broken a hoop and let a little red liquid weep out, which the two men were tasting on the tips of their fingers and found delicious. They might as well drink one glass; it wouldn't matter to any one. But La Queue wouldn't have it. He made the cask fast in the bottom of the boat, and declared that the first man who took a suck at it would have to talk to him. They would see about it on shore.

——"Then," asked Tupain in a huff, "we'll go and haul in the hoop-nets?"

——"Yes, by and by, there's no hurry," answered La Queue.

He, too, was eyeing the barrel caressingly. He felt as if his limbs were all limp and longed to go ashore at once, to taste the stuff. Fish made him tired.

——"Bah!" said he, after a moment's silence, "let's put back; it's getting late. . . . We'll come out again to-morrow."

And he was just letting his fishing slide when he caught sight of another cask on his right, a little bit of a one this time, standing up straight and spinning round like a top. It was all up with his nets and "jambins." He did not even mention them again. The *Zephyr* gave chase to the little barrel, which, for matter of that, she fished up very easily.

All this time the *Whale* was having a similar adventure. Just as Rouget had finished looking into five hoop-nets, which he found quite empty, Delphin, who was still on the lookout, called out that he saw something. But it didn't look like a cask, it was too long.

——"It's a piece of timber," said Fouasse.

Rouget let go his sixth hoop-net before he had quite got it out of the water.

——"Let's go and see, all the same," said he.

As they drew nearer they thought they made out a plank, a packing case, the trunk of a tree. Then they raised a shout of joy. It was a real cask, but a right funny one, the like of which they had never seen. It looked like a tube, swelled out in the middle and closed at both ends with plaster.

——"Ah! it's a comical one!" cried Rouget in delight. "I want the Emperor to taste this one. . . . Come, boys, let's go in!"

They agreed not to taste a drop of it, and the *Whale* got back to Coqueville at the very moment that the *Zephyr*, on her part, reached her moorings in the little harbor. Not an inquisitive soul had left the beach. Shouts of joy greeted this unhoped-for catch of three casks. The boys tossed their caps into the air, while the women ran for glasses. It was decided outright to taste the liquids on the spot. Everything coming from a wreck belonged to the village. There was no dispute on this head. Only, two groups were formed: the Mahés crowded round Rouget, the Floches would not let go of La Queue.

——"Emperor, the first glass for you!" cried Rouget. "Tell us what it is."

The liquor was a beautiful golden yellow. The constable raised his glass, looked at it, smelt of it, and then made up his mind to drink.

——"That comes from Holland," he said after a long silence.

He vouchsafed nothing further. All the Mahés drank with respect. It was a little thick, and they were surprised at a taste of flowers it had. The women thought it very nice. As for the men, they would have preferred less sugar; but then, after all, it got to be strong by the third or fourth glass. The more of it you drank, the better you liked it. The men got jolly and the women queer.

But, in spite of his recent quarrels with the mayor, the Emperor went to hover round the Floche party. The bigger of their casks gave out a dark red liquor, while from the very small one they drew a white liquid, like rock water; and this one was the stiffest, a regular pepper, something to make your tongue peel. Not one of the Floches knew what they were, neither the red nor the white one; and yet there were sharp fellows among them, too. It bothered them to have a treat, without knowing what it was.

——"Here! Emperor, taste that," said La Queue at last, thus taking the first step.

The Emperor, who had been waiting for the invitation, posed once more as a wine-taster.

At the red he said,—

—— "There's orange in that!"

And at the white he declared,—

—— "That's bully, that is!"

They had to put up with these answers, for he wagged his head as if he had made himself understood, with the comfortable expression of a man who felt he had done all that was expected of him.

The abbé Radiguet alone did not seem convinced. He wanted to know their names. To believe him, he had the names on the tip of his tongue; and, to make sure, he drank one small glass after another, repeating,—

—— "Wait a bit, wait a bit, I know what it is. . . . I'll tell you in a minute."

Meanwhile the groups of Mahés and Floches grew gayer and gayer. The latter laughed particularly loud because they mixed their liquors, and this tickled them the more; but both remained apart. They did not offer one another a drink out of their casks; but they cast sympathetic glances at each other, each party being bitten with an unacknowledged longing to taste its neighbor's liquor, which seemed as if it must be better than its own. The hostile brothers,

Tupain and Fouasse, were close together the whole evening without showing their fists. It was also noticed that Rouget and his wife drank out of the same cup. As for Margot, she passed the liquor round in the Floche set; and, as she filled the glasses too full and the liquor ran over upon her fingers, she was continually sucking them; so that, though she obeyed her father, who had forbidden her to drink, she got as tipsy as a girl at vintage time. It was not unbecoming to her; quite the contrary. She was all rosy, her eyes like candles.

The sun was setting and the evening as mild as spring. Coqueville finished the casks and never thought of going home to dinner. It was too comfortable on the beach. When total darkness had set in, Margot, who was sitting apart from the rest, felt some one blowing upon the nape of her neck. It was Delphin, who had got very jolly, prowling round about her on all fours like a wolf. She stifled a scream so as to not give the alarm to her father, who would have given Delphin a kick in the backside.

——"Go away, stupid!" she whispered, half in anger, half laughing. "You'll get caught!"

IV

WHEN Coqueville awoke next day, it found the sun high above the horizon. The weather was still warmer, a slumbering sea beneath a clear sky, one of those lazy days when it is good to do nothing. It was Wednesday. Coqueville rested up to breakfast-time after its treat of the evening before. Then the folk came down to the beach to see.

That Wednesday, fishing, the widow Dufeu, M. Mouchel, and everything were forgotten. La Queue and Rouget did not even speak of going to look at their hoop-nets. At about three some casks were signalled. Four were dancing opposite the village. The *Zephyr* and the *Whale* gave chase; but, as there was enough for all, there was no quarrelling, and each boat got its share.

At six Rouget and La Queue, after searching the little bay, came in with three casks apiece. And the festivities began afresh. The women brought down tables, to be more comfortable. They even brought benches and set up two

cafés in the open air, just like those in Grandport. The Mahés were on the left, the Floches on the right, still separated by a sand heap. But that evening, the Emperor, who kept going from one party to another, handed round full glasses, so that everybody could taste the six casks. Toward nine they were much gayer than on the night before. Coqueville never could remember next day how it got to bed.

On Thursday the *Zephyr* and the *Whale* only fished up four casks, two apiece; but they were tremendous ones. On Friday the catch was superb, beyond all hope; there were seven casks, three for Rouget and four for La Queue. Then Coqueville entered upon a golden age. Nobody did anything. The fishermen, sleeping off their last night's liquor, did not get up till noon. Then they loafed down to the beach and questioned the sea. Their only care was to speculate upon what liquor the tide would bring them. They would stay there for hours with fixed eyes; they gave shouts of joy as soon as anything from the wreck appeared. From the top of the rocks the women and children would point out with violent gesticulation even the smallest bunches of seaweed washed along by the waves. And presently the *Zephyr* and *Whale* would be ready to start. They would

put out, beat the bay, fish for casks as you would for tunny, having got by this time to despise the reassured mackerel cutting capers in the sun, and the lazy sole rocking on the surface of the water. Coqueville followed the fishing in fits of laughter on the sand. Then in the evening they would drink up their catch.

What filled Coqueville with enthusiasm was that the supply of casks did not give out. When they were all gone, there were more left. Really, the ship that had gone to pieces must have had a pretty cargo on board; and Coqueville, grown selfish and gay, poked fun at that wrecked ship, a regular liquor cellar, enough to get all the fish in the ocean drunk. Besides, they never fished up two casks alike; there were casks of every shape, of every size, of every color. Then, with every cask there was a different liquid. The Emperor was accordingly plunged in profound reveries; he who had drunk of everything completely lost his bearings. La Queue declared that he had never seen a cargo the like of that. The abbé Radiguet guessed it must have been an order from some savage king who meant to set up a cellar. For the rest, Coqueville stopped trying to understand it all, lulled in unknown intoxications.

The ladies preferred the crêmes: there were crêmes of mocha, of cocoa, of peppermint, of vanilla. One evening Marie Rouget drank so much anisette that it made her sick. Margot and the other young misses went in for the curaçao, benedictine, trappistine, and chartreuse. As for the cassis, that was set aside for the small children. Of course the men were gladder when they fished up cognacs, rums, gins, anything that was hot in the mouth. Then there were surprises. A cask of Chios raki, with mastic in it, dumfounded Coqueville; every one thought he had fallen foul of a cask of spirits of turpentine; but they drank it all the same, because nothing must be wasted; they remembered it, though, for a long while after. Batavia arrack, Swedish cumin-brandy, Roumanian *tuica calugaresca*, Servian *sliwowitz*, equally upset all Coqueville's notions of what a man could swallow. Upon the whole, there was a weakness for the Kümmel and Kirsch, liquors clear as water and stiff enough to kill a man. Could it be that so many good things had been invented! At Coqueville they only knew of brandy; and not every one, at that. And their imaginations grew more and more excited, they got to a pitch of veritable devoutness in face of this inexhaustible variety

of things that intoxicate. Oh! to get drunk on something new every evening, and not to know its very name! It was like a fairy tale, a rain, a fountain spitting forth extraordinary liquids, flavored with every flower and fruit in all creation.

So on Friday evening there were seven casks on the beach. Coqueville had given up leaving the beach at all. It lived there, thanks to the mildness of the weather. Never had they enjoyed so fine a week in September. The spree had lasted ever since Monday; and there seemed to be no reason why it should not go on forever, if Providence kept sending casks; for the abbé Radiguet saw the finger of Providence in it. All business was suspended; what was the use of running about, when pleasure came to you in your sleep? They were all bourgeois of leisure, bourgeois who drank expensive liquors without having any score to pay at the café. Coqueville sunned itself luxuriously with its hands in its pockets, waiting for the evening's treat. Besides, it stopped sobering up; it passed from the hilarity of Kümmel straight on to that of Kirsch and ratafia; in seven days it made acquaintance with the angers of gin, the lachrymose sensibilities of curaçao, the laughter of cognac. And Coque-

ville remained innocent as the new-born babe, knowing nothing about anything, drinking in good faith whatever the good God sent it.

It was on Friday that the Mahés fraternized with the Floches. They were very jolly that evening. The distance between them had already grown less the evening before, for the drunker ones trampled down the sand heap that separated the two parties. Only one step more was left to be taken. On the Floche side four casks were being drained, while the Mahés, too, were finishing their three little barrels,—three liquors that just made up the French flag, one blue, one white, and one red. The blue one filled the Floches with envy, because they thought a blue liquor something really astounding. La Queue, grown good-natured ever since he had stopped getting sober, came forward, glass in hand, comprehending that he, as a magistrate, must make the first advance.

—— "Come, Rouget," he stammered out, "will you clink glasses?"

—— "Don't care if I do," answered Rouget, who was staggering with sentimental emotion.

They fell upon each other's necks. Then everybody broke out into tears, so deeply were they affected. The Mahés and Floches embraced, they who had been devouring each

other for centuries. The abbé Radiguet was much touched, and spoke again of the finger of God. They drank a toast in the three liquors, the blue, the white, and the red.

——"Hurrah for France!" shouted the Emperor.

The blue was no good, the white not much better, but the red was stunning. They went for the Floche casks next. Then there was dancing. As there was no band, some accommodating young fellows clapped their hands and whistled, which enraptured the girls. The jollification got to be superb. The seven casks were drawn up in a row; every one could choose what he liked best. Those who had had enough stretched themselves out on the sand and took a nap, and when they woke up went at it again. The others spread out the ball little by little, and took up the whole beach. They danced in the open air till midnight. The sea murmured gently, the stars twinkled in the deep sky in immeasurable peace. It was the serenity of the infant ages, encompassing the joy of a tribe of savages drunk with its first cask of brandy.

Nevertheless, Coqueville still went home to bed. When there was nothing left to drink, the Floches and Mahés helped each other, car-

ried each other, and managed to find their way to bed as well as they could. On Saturday the spree lasted up to nearly two in the morning. They had fished up six casks, two of which were enormous. Fouasse and Tupain almost came to blows. Tupain, who was ugly in his cups, talked of finishing off his brother; but everybody was shocked at this quarrel, the Floches as well as the Mahés. Was it reasonable to keep on fighting when the whole village was kissing? They made the two brothers drink together; they did so grudgingly, and the Emperor promised to keep an eye on them. Neither did the Rouget household get on swimmingly. When Marie had drunk some anisette, she heaped attentions upon Brisemotte, which Rouget could not contemplate calmly; the less so that he, growing sentimental, wanted to be loved himself. The abbé Radiguet, full of gentleness, might preach forgiveness of injuries till he was black in the face, an accident was to be feared.

—— "Bosh," said La Queue, "it'll all come out right. If we have a good catch to-morrow, you'll see. . . . Here's to you!"

Still La Queue was not quite right yet himself. He kept watching Delphin, and would let fly a kick or so at him so soon as he saw him go

near Margot. The Emperor was scandalized, for there was no sense in spoiling sport between two young people. But La Queue still swore he would rather kill Margot than give her to the young one. Besides, Margot wouldn't agree to it.

—— "Isn't that so? you're too proud," he cried. "You'll never marry a beggar!"

—— "Never, papa!" answered Margot.

On Saturday, Margot drank a good deal of a sweet cordial. You couldn't imagine the like of such sugar. As she was off her guard, she very soon found herself sitting on the ground beside the cask. She was laughing, happy, in Paradise; she saw stars, she felt as if she had a band playing dance-tunes in her inside. Just then Delphin glided into the shadow of the cask. He took her hand and asked, —

—— "Say, Margot, will you?"

She kept on smiling. Then she replied, —

—— "It's all papa who isn't willing."

—— "Oh! that don't matter," the young one went on. "The old folks never are willing, you know. . . . As long as you're willing yourself."

He grew bolder and gave her a kiss on the neck. She bridled, a shiver ran over her shoulders.

—— "Have done, you tickle."

But she said nothing more about boxing his ears. She could not have done it, to begin with, her hands were too limp. Then those little kisses on her neck felt good. They were like the cordial that benumbed her so deliciously. At last she rolled her head to one side and stuck out her chin like a cat.

—— "Here!" she stammered out, — "here under my ear, it itches there. . . . Oh! that's nice."

Both had forgotten La Queue. Luckily the Emperor was on the lookout. He called the abbé Radiguet to look at them, saying,—

—— "Look here, curé. . . . It would be best to marry them."

—— "Morality would gain by it," the priest answered sententiously.

And he took the matter upon himself for the morrow. He would speak to La Queue. Meanwhile La Queue had drunk so much that the Emperor and curé had to carry him home. They tried to reason with him about his daughter on the way; but they could get nothing out of him but grunts. Behind them Delphin saw Margot home through the bright night.

By four next day the *Zephyr* and *Whale* had fished up seven casks. At six the *Zephyr* fished up two more. That made nine. Then

Coqueville celebrated Sunday. And the spree was complete, a spree the like of which was never seen before and will never be seen again. Just mention it in Lower Normandy, and people will say with a laugh, "Ah! yes, the Coqueville spree!"

V

MEANWHILE M. Mouchel was astonished on Tuesday to see neither Rouget nor La Queue come to Grandport. What the devil could those fellows be about? The sea was calm, there ought to be splendid fishing. Perhaps they meant to bring him a whole boatload of soles and lobsters at once. So he waited patiently till Wednesday.

On Wednesday, M. Mouchel began to get angry. You must know that the widow Dufeu was no joke. She was a woman who would come to hard words in a jiffy. Though he was a good-looking fellow, fair-haired and strong, he trembled before her, and all the more because he hoped to marry her; he was very attentive, contenting himself with the prospect of calming her down with a box on the ear, if ever he should get to be her master. So on Wednesday morning the widow Dufeu was in a storming rage, complaining that those people had stopped sending anything in, and that they themselves were short of fish; and she taxed him with running

after the girls alongshore, instead of looking after his whiting and mackerel, which ought to be plentiful. M. Mouchel was annoyed, and fell back upon Coqueville's singular breach of faith. The surprise pacified the widow Dufeu for a moment. What could Coqueville be thinking of? It had never acted in that way before. But she declared directly that she didn't care a rap for Coqueville; that it was M. Mouchel's business to keep her advised, and that she would know what to do if he let himself be taken in by the fishermen. At this he got very anxious and wished Rouget and La Queue to the devil. Perhaps they would come to-morrow, all the same.

Next day, Thursday, neither of them appeared. Towards evening M. Mouchel went up in despair to the top of the rock at the left of Grandport, from which you can see Coqueville in the distance, with the yellow spot made by its beach. He looked long. The village looked quiet in the sunshine, light streaks of smoke were coming out from the chimneys; no doubt the women were cooking their soup. M. Mouchel ascertained that Coqueville was still in its place, and that a rock from the bluff had not crushed it; he understood it less than ever. Just as he was on the point of coming down again he thought

he made out two black dots in the bay, the *Whale* and the *Zephyr*. So he went back to calm down the widow Dufeu. Coqueville was fishing.

The night passed by. Friday came. Still no Coqueville. M. Mouchel climbed up his rock over ten times. He was beginning to lose his head; the widow Dufeu called him the most abominable names, and he could think of no answer to give her. There was Coqueville, still basking in the sun like a lazy lizard. Only, M. Mouchel did not seem to see any more smoke. The village seemed to be dead. Could they all have died in their holes? There was a swarm of something on the beach; but it might be seaweed, washed up by the tide.

On Saturday, nobody yet. The widow Dufeu was past crying: her eyes were fixed and her lips white. M. Mouchel spent two hours on top of his rock. A curiosity was growing within him, a feeling as if he must account to his own satisfaction for the strange stagnation of the village. Those huts blissfully sleeping there in the sun got to the pitch of annoying him. His mind was made up: he would set out very early Monday morning and try to be there about nine.

Going to Coqueville was no pleasure trip. M. Mouchel thought best to take the land road;

he would thus come upon the village without being expected. A carriage took him as far as Robigneux, where he left it in a barn; for it would not have been prudent to venture into the gorges with it. He set out briskly, having more than four miles before him over the most atrocious of roads. The walk, however, has a wild beauty of its own; the path leads down with continual turnings between two enormous barriers of rock, and so narrow is it at times that three men cannot pass through abreast. Farther on it runs along the brink of precipices; the gorge opens abruptly, and you catch glimpses of the sea and of boundless blue horizons. But M. Mouchel was in no frame of mind to admire the landscape. He swore when the stones turned under his heel. It was all Coqueville's fault; he promised to shake up those do-nothings in fine style. Meanwhile he was getting nearer. All of a sudden, at the turning round the last rock, he caught sight of the twenty houses of the village, hanging to the side of the bluff.

It was striking nine. It was like June, so blue and warm was the sky; the weather was superb, the clear air gilt with a dust of sunshine and cooled by the good sea smell. M. Mouchel passed into the only street of the village, where he had been often before; when he came to

Rouget's house he went in. The house was empty. He next gave a look in at Fouasse's, at Tupain's, at Brisemotte's. Not a soul; all the doors open and nobody in the rooms. What did it mean? He felt a slight chill creep over his skin. Then he bethought him of the authorities. Surely the Emperor would tell him about it. But the Emperor's house was empty like the rest; even the constable was gone! This deserted and silent village frightened him by this time. He ran to the mayor's. There another surprise awaited him: the house was in abominable disorder; the beds had not been made for three days; the crockery was lying round, and the topsyturvied chairs seemed to tell of some fight. Thoroughly upset and imagining all sorts of cataclysms, M. Mouchel made up his mind to see it through to the end, and went to the church. No more curé than mayor. The very powers of religion herself had vanished. Deserted Coqueville slept there without a living breath, without a dog, without a cat. There was not even any poultry left, the hens were gone. Nothing, a void, silence, leaden sleep, beneath the broad blue sky.

Egad! no wonder Coqueville had brought no fish! Coqueville had moved, Coqueville was dead. The police must be notified. This mys-

terious catastrophe was driving M. Mouchel half crazy when, it having occurred to him to go down to the beach, he gave a shriek. The entire population was lying prostrate on the sand. There must have been a general massacre. But a sonorous snoring undeceived him. Coqueville had kept up its spree so late Sunday night that it was absolutely unable to get home to bed. So it slept on the sand just where it fell, round the nine casks, which were all drunk up.

Yes, all Coqueville was snoring there; I mean, the children, women, old people, and men. Not one was left standing. Some were on their bellies, some on their backs; others lay bunched up with their chin between their knees. As you make your bed, so must you lie; and the rascals lay scattered there as drunken luck had thrown them down, like a handful of leaves blown by the wind. Some of the men had tumbled head over heels and were lying head downmost. Women showed their backsides. It was full of artless good-nature, an open-air dormitory, a lot of people making themselves at home among friends; for there is no fun where constraint is.

It was just new moon. Coqueville, thinking it had blown out its candle, had let itself go in the dark. Then daylight came; and now

the sun was flaming, a sun that cast its rays straight down upon the sleepers without making them wink an eyelid. They were fast asleep with their jolly faces, in the beautiful innocence of drunkards. The chickens must have come down early in the morning to peck at the casks, for they, too, were lying drunk on the sand. There were even five cats and three dogs with their paws in the air, tipsy from licking the glasses that had trickled with sugar.

M. Mouchel walked round among the sleepers for a moment, taking care not to step on any one. He saw it all, for some casks from the wreck of an English vessel had been picked up in Grandport, too. All his wrath fell. What a touching and moral spectacle! Coqueville in one general reconciliation, the Mahés and Floches lying side by side! At the last glass the worst enemies had fallen into each other's arms. Tupain and Fouasse were snoring hand in hand, like brothers incapable henceforth of contesting a will. As for the Rouget household, it presented a still more amiable picture; Marie slept between Rouget and Brisemotte, as if to say that from this day forward they would live thus, happy all three.

But above all, one group showed a family scene fit to move a stone to sensibility. It was

Delphin and Margot, with their arms round each other's necks; they slept there cheek to cheek, with their lips still parted after a kiss. At their feet the Emperor lay crosswise, guarding them. Above them La Queue snored like a father satisfied with having settled his daughter for life, while the abbé Radiguet, who had fallen there like the rest, seemed to be giving them his blessing with his outspread arms. In her sleep Margot still stretched out her rosy face, like a cat in love that likes to be scratched under the chin.

The spree had wound up with a wedding. And M. Mouchel himself afterwards married the widow Dufeu, whom he beats to a jelly. Just mention it in Lower Normandy, and people will say with a laugh, "Ah! yes, the Coqueville spree!"

THE ATTACK ON THE MILL

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I

Old Merlier's mill was in high feather, that fine summer evening. In the courtyard they had set out three tables, end to end, ready for the guests. All the country knew that, on that day, Merlier's daughter Françoise was to be betrothed to Dominique, a fellow who had the name of being an idle loafer, but whom the women for eight miles round looked at with glistening eyes, so well-favored was he.

This mill of old Merlier's was a real delight. It stood just in the middle of Rocreuse, at the point where the highway makes a sharp turn. The village has only one street, two rows of hovels, one row on each side of the road; but there, at the corner, the fields spread out wide, great trees, following the course of the Morelle, cover the depths of the valley with a magnificent shade. There is not in all Lorraine a more lovely bit of nature. To the right and left, thick woods of century-old trees rise up the

gentle slopes, filling the horizon with a sea of verdure; while, towards the south, the plain stretches out marvellously fertile, unfolding without end its plots of land divided by live hedges. But what, above all else, gives Rocreuse its charm is the coolness of this green nook in the hottest days of July and August. The Morelle comes down from the Gagny woods, and it seems as if it brought with it the coolness of the foliage beneath which it flows for miles; it brings the murmuring sounds, the icy and sequestered shade of the forests. And it is not the only source of coolness: all sorts of running water babble beneath the trees; at every step, springs gush forth; you feel, while following the narrow paths, as if subterranean lakes were forcing their way through the moss, and taking advantage of the smallest fissures, at the foot of trees, between rocks, to overflow in crystalline fountains. The whispering voices of these brooks rise so multitudinous and high that they drown the bullfinches' song. You would think yourself in some enchanted park, with waterfalls on every hand.

Below, the meadows are soaking wet. Gigantic chestnuts cast their black shadows. Along the edge of the fields, long lines of poplars spread out their rustling drapery. There

are two avenues of huge sycamore-maples rising across the fields, up toward the old château of Gagny, now in ruins. In this perpetually watered soil the weeds grow rank. It is like a flower garden lying between two wooded hillsides; but a natural garden, in which the lawns are fields, and giant trees trace out colossal flower beds. When the sun, at noon, casts its rays straight down, the shadows turn blue, the scorched weeds slumber in the heat, while an icy shudder runs along beneath the foliage.

It was there that old Merlier's mill enlivened a nook of rank green growth with its clacking. The building, of planks and mortar, seemed as old as the world. Half of it dipped into the Morelle, which, at this point, widens out into a clear, rounded basin. A dam was contrived to let the water fall from a height of several metres upon the mill-wheel, which turned creaking, with the asthmatic cough of a faithful servant, grown old in the household. When people advised old Merlier to change it for a new one, he would shake his head, saying that a young wheel would be lazier and not so well up in its business; and he mended the old one with everything that came to hand,—staves of casks, bits of rusty iron, zinc, lead. The wheel seemed all the gayer for it, its outline grown strange, all beplumed with

weeds and moss. When the water beat against it with its silver stream, it would cover itself with beads, you saw it deck out its strange carcass with a sparkling bedizenment of mother-of-pearl necklaces.

The part of the mill that thus dipped into the Morelle looked like a barbarous ark, stranded there. A good half of the structure was built on piles. The water ran in under the board floor; there, too, were holes, well known in the country for the eels and enormous crawfish caught there. Above the fall, the basin was as clear as a mirror, and when the wheel did not cloud it with its foam, you could see shoals of large fish swimming there with the deliberateness of a naval squadron. A broken flight of steps led down to the river, near a stake to which a boat was moored. A wooden balcony ran above the wheel. Windows opened upon it, cut at irregular distances. This pellmell of corners, little walls, L's added as an afterthought, beams and bits of roof, gave the mill the appearance of an old dismantled citadel. But ivy had grown there, all sorts of climbing vines had stopped up the too wide cracks and thrown a cloak of green over the old dwelling. Young ladies who passed by would sketch old Merlier's mill in their albums.

Toward the road the house was stouter. A stone gateway opened upon the main courtyard, which was bordered on the right by sheds and stables. Near a well a huge elm covered half the courtyard with its shade. At the farther end, the house showed the line of its four first-story windows, surmounted by a pigeon-house. Old Merlier's only bit of dandyism was to have this wall whitewashed every ten years. It had just been whitened, and dazzled the village when the sun lighted it up in the middle of the day.

For twenty years old Merlier had been mayor of Rocreuse. He was esteemed for the fortune he had managed to make. He was supposed to be worth something like eighty thousand francs, laid up sou by sou. When he married Madeleine Guillard, who brought him the mill as her dowry, he hardly possessed anything but his two arms; but Madeleine never repented her choice, so well did he manage the affairs of the household. Now that his wife was dead, he remained a widower with his daughter Françoise. No doubt, he might have taken a rest, left his mill to sleep in the moss; but he would have been too much bored, and the house would have seemed dead to him. He kept on working, for the fun of it.

Old Merlier was then a tall old man, with a long, silent face, never laughing, but very jolly internally, nevertheless. He had been chosen for mayor on account of his money, and also for the fine air he knew how to assume, when he married a couple.

Françoise Merlier was just eighteen. She did not pass for one of the beauties of the countryside; she was too puny. Up to the age of eleven, she was even ugly. No one in Rocreuse could understand how the daughter of father and mother Merlier, both of them ruggedly built, could grow up so ill and, so to speak, grudgingly. But at fifteen, although still delicate, she had the prettiest little face in the world. She had black hair, black eyes, and at the same time was all rosy; a mouth that laughed all the time, dimpled cheeks, a clear brow on which there seemed to rest a crown of sunshine. Although puny for the neighborhood, she was not thin, far from it; people only meant that she could not shoulder a sack of grain; but she grew very plump with time, and stood a good chance of ending by being round and dainty as a quail. Only her father's long spells of speechlessness had made her thoughtful at an early age. If she was always laughing, it was to give others pleasure. At bottom, she was serious.

Naturally all the countryside courted her, still more for her dollars than for her niceness. And at last, she made a choice that had just scandalized the country. On the other side of the Morelle lived a young fellow, named Dominique Penquer. He did not belong in Rocreuse. Ten years before, he had come there from Belgium, to take possession of a legacy from an uncle of his who owned a little piece of property on the very outskirts of the Gagny forest, just opposite the mill, within a few gunshots. He came to sell this property, he said, and go home again. But the country fascinated him, it seems, for he did not stir. He was seen tilling his bit of field, picking a few vegetables, on which he lived. He fished, he went shooting; several times, the gamekeepers just missed catching him and reporting him to the authorities. This free life, the material resources of which the peasants could not well account for, had at last given him a bad name. He was vaguely spoken of as a poacher. At all events, he was lazy, for he was often found asleep in the grass at times when he ought to have been at work. The hut in which he lived, under the first trees of the forest, did not look like an honest fellow's dwelling either. If he had had business with the wolves of the old

ruins of Gagny, it would not have surprised the old women. Yet the girls would, now and then, have the audacity to stand up for him; for this suspicious man was a superb fellow, tall and supple as a poplar, with a very white skin, and fair beard and hair that shone like gold in the sun. So, one fine morning, Françoise declared to her father that she loved Dominique, and that she would never consent to marry any one else.

You can imagine what a blow old Merlier received that day. He said nothing, as usual. He always looked thoughtful in the face; only his internal jollity stopped sparkling in his eyes. The two did not speak for a week. Françoise, too, was very grave. What bothered old Merlier was to make out how in the world that rascal of a poacher could have bewitched his daughter. Dominique had never come to the mill. The miller began to watch him, and espied the gallant on the other side of the Morelle, lying in the grass and pretending to be asleep. The thing was clear: they must have fallen in love, making sheep's-eyes at each other across the mill-wheel.

Meanwhile another week passed by. Françoise looked more and more solemn. Old Merlier still said nothing. Then, one evening,

he brought Dominique home with him, without a word. Françoise was just setting the table. She did not seem astonished; she only added another plate and knife and fork; but the little dimples appeared once more in her cheeks, and her laugh came back again. That morning, old Merlier had gone after Dominique to his hut on the outskirts of the wood. There the two men had talked for three hours, with closed doors and windows. No one ever knew what they found to say to each other. What was certain was that, on coming out, old Merlier already treated Dominique like his own son. No doubt, the old man had found the man he was after, a fine fellow, in this lazybones who lay in the grass to make the girls fall in love with him.

All Rocreuse gossiped. The women, in the doorways, did not run dry of tittle-tattle about old Merlier's folly in taking a scapegrace into his household. He let them talk on. Perhaps he remembered his own marriage. Neither had he a red sou, when he married Madeleine and her mill; but that did not prevent his making a good husband. Besides, Dominique cut the gossip short by going to work with such a will that the whole country marvelled at it. It so happened that the

miller's boy had just been drafted; and Dominique would never hear of his hiring another. He carried the sacks, drove the cart, struggled with the old wheel when it had to be begged hard before it would turn, and all with such a will that people would come to look at him, for sheer pleasure. Old Merlier laughed his quiet laugh. He was very proud of having scented out this fellow. There is nothing like love for putting heart into young people.

In the midst of all this hard work, Françoise and Dominique adored each other. They hardly ever spoke, but they looked at each other with smiling tenderness. So far, old Merlier had not said a single word about the marriage; and they both respected this silence, awaiting the old man's pleasure. At last, one day about the middle of July, he had three tables set out in the courtyard under the big elm, inviting his friends in Rocreuse to come and take a drink with him in the evening. When the courtyard was full, and every one had his glass in his hand, old Merlier raised his very high, saying, —

—— "This is for the pleasure of announcing to you that Françoise will marry that fellow there in a month, on Saint-Louis's day."

Then they clinked glasses noisily. Every-

body laughed. But old Merlier, raising his voice, went on, —

—— "Dominique, kiss your intended. That must be done."

And they kissed each other, very red, while the crowd laughed still louder. It was a real jollification. A small cask was emptied. Then, when only the intimate friends were left, they chatted quietly. Night had come, a starlit and very clear night. Dominique and Françoise, sitting side by side on a bench, said nothing. An old peasant spoke of the war the emperor had declared with Prussia. All the boys in the village were already gone. The day before, troops had passed through. There would be hard knocks going.

—— "Bah!" said old Merlier, with a happy man's egoism. "Dominique is a foreigner, he won't go. . . . And, if the Prussians come, he will be here to defend his wife."

This notion that the Prussians might come seemed a good joke. They were to be given an A 1 thrashing, and it would be soon over.

—— "I've seen 'em, I've seen 'em," the old peasant said over and over again.

There was a silence. Then they clinked glasses once more. Françoise and Dominique

had heard nothing; they had taken each other softly by the hand, behind the bench, so that no one could see them, and it seemed so good that they stayed there, their eyes lost in the depths of the darkness.

How warm and splendid a night! The village was falling asleep on both sides of the road, tranquil as a child. You only heard, from time to time, the crowing of some cock, waked too soon. From the great woods hard by came long breaths that passed like caresses over the roofs. The meadows, with their black shadows, put on a mysterious and secluded majesty, while all the running waters that gushed forth into the darkness seemed to be the cool and rhythmic breathing of the sleeping country. At moments, the mill-wheel, fast asleep, seemed to be dreaming, like those old watchdogs that bark while snoring. It creaked, it talked all by itself, lulled by the falls of the Morelle, whose sheet of water gave forth the sustained and musical note of an organ pipe. Never had more widespread peace fallen over a happier corner of the earth.

II

Just a month later, day for day, on Saint-Louis's eve, Rocreuse was in dismay. The Prussians had beaten the emperor, and were advancing toward the village by forced marches. For a week past, people passing along the road had announced the Prussians: "They are at Lormière, they are at Novelles"; and, hearing that they were approaching so fast, Rocreuse thought, every morning, to see them come down by the Gagny woods. Still they did not come; this frightened the inhabitants still more. They would surely fall upon the village at night, and cut everybody's throat.

The night before, a little before daybreak, there had been an alarm. The inhabitants had waked up, hearing a great noise of men on the road. The women were just falling upon their knees and crossing themselves, when red trousers were recognized through cracks of windows prudently opened. It was a detachment of French. The captain immediately asked for the mayor of the place, and stayed at the mill, after talking with old Merlier.

The sun rose gayly that day. It would be hot at noon. Over the woods floated a yellow light, while in the distance, above the meadows, rose white vapors. The clean, pretty village awoke in the cool air, and the country, with its river and springs, had the dew-sprinkled loveliness of a nosegay. But this fine weather made no one laugh. They had just seen the captain walk round about the mill, examine the neighboring houses, cross to the other side of the Morelle, and from there study the country through a spyglass; old Merlier, who was with him, seemed to be explaining the country to him. Then the captain stationed soldiers behind walls, behind trees, in holes in the ground. The bulk of the detachment was encamped in the courtyard of the mill. So there was to be a fight? And when old Merlier came back, he was plied with questions. He gave a long nod with his head, without speaking. Yes, there was to be a fight.

Françoise and Dominique were in the courtyard, looking at him. At last, he took his pipe out of his mouth and said simply, —

—— "Ah! my poor children, there will be no wedding for you to-morrow!"

Dominique, his lips set, a line of anger

across his forehead, raised himself up on tiptoe from time to time, with his eyes fixed on the Gagny woods, as if he longed to see the Prussians come. Françoise, very pale, serious, came and went, supplying the soldiers with what they needed. They were making their soup in a corner of the courtyard, and joking while waiting for their meal.

Meanwhile the captain seemed delighted. He had examined the rooms and the great hall of the mill, looking out upon the river. Now, sitting by the well, he was talking with old Merlier.

—— "You have a real fortress here," said he. "We ought to hold out till evening. . . . The beggars are late. They should be here by this time."

The miller looked serious. He saw his mill flaming like a torch; but he did not complain, thinking it useless. He only opened his mouth to say, —

—— "You ought to have some one hide the boat behind the wheel. There is a hole there that will hold her. . . . Perhaps she may be of use."

The captain gave an order. This captain was a handsome man of about forty, tall and with a kindly face. The sight of Françoise and

Dominique seemed to please him. He was interested in them, as if he had forgotten the coming struggle. He followed Françoise about with his eyes, and his look told plainly that he found her charming. Then, turning to Dominique, —

—— "So you're not in the army, my boy?" he asked abruptly.

—— "I'm a foreigner," the young man answered.

The captain seemed only half pleased with this reason. He winked and smiled. Françoise was pleasanter company than cannon. Then, seeing him smile, Dominique added, —

—— "I'm a foreigner, but I can put a bullet into an apple at five hundred metres. . . . See, my gun's there, behind you."

—— "It may be of use to you," the captain replied simply.

Françoise had come up, trembling a little. And, without minding the people there, Dominique took both the hands she held out to him, and pressed them in his, as if to take her under his protection. The captain smiled again, but added not a word. He remained sitting, his sword between his legs, his eyes looking at vacancy, as if in a dream.

It was already two o'clock. It was growing

very hot. There was a dead silence. In the courtyard, under the sheds, the soldiers had fallen to eating their soup. Not a sound came from the village, in which the people had barricaded their houses, doors and windows. A dog, left alone in the road, was howling. From the neighboring woods and meadows, motionless in the heat, came a far-off voice, long sustained, made up of every separate breath of air. A cuckoo was singing. Then the silence spread itself over the country also.

And, in this slumbering air, a shot suddenly burst forth. The captain sprang up quickly, the soldiers dropped their plates of soup, still half full. In a few seconds, every man was at his post for the fight; the mill was occupied from top to bottom. Yet the captain, who had gone out upon the road, could make out nothing; to the right and left, the road stretched out, empty and all white. A second shot was heard, and still nothing, not a shadow; but, on turning round, he espied, over towards Gagny, between two trees, a light cloudlet of smoke wafted away like gossamer. The wood was still profoundly quiet.

—— "The rascals have taken to the forest," he muttered. "They know we are here."

Then the firing kept up, harder and harder,

between the French soldiers, stationed round the mill, and the Prussians, hidden behind the trees. The bullets whistled across the Morelle, without occasioning any loss on one side or the other. The shots were irregular, came from every bush; and all you saw was still the little clouds of smoke gently wafted away by the wind. This lasted for nearly two hours. The officer hummed a tune, as if indifferent. Françoise and Dominique, who had stayed in the courtyard, raised themselves up on tiptoe, and looked over the wall. They were particularly interested in watching a little soldier, stationed on the brink of the Morelle, behind the hulk of an old boat; he was flat on his belly, watched his chance, fired his shot, then let himself slide down into a ditch, a little behind him, to reload his rifle; and his movements were so droll, so cunning, so supple, that it made one smile to see him. He must have espied the head of some Prussian, for he got up quickly and brought his piece to his shoulder; but, before he fired, he gave a cry, turned over upon himself, and rolled into the ditch, where his legs stiffened out with the momentary, convulsive jerk of those of a chicken with its neck wrung. The little soldier had received a bullet full in the breast. He was the first man

killed. Instinctively Françoise seized hold of Dominique's hand and squeezed it with a nervous grip.

—— "Don't stay there," said the captain. "The bullets reach here."

As he spoke a little, sharp stroke was heard in the old elm, and a branch fell in zigzags through the air; but the two young people did not stir, riveted there by anxiety at the sight. On the outskirts of the wood, a Prussian came out suddenly from behind a tree, as from a side scene, beating the air with his arms, and tumbling over backwards. And then nothing stirred, the two dead men seemed to sleep in the dazzling sunshine, you saw no one in the torpid landscape. Even the crack of the shots stopped. Only the Morelle kept up its silver-toned whispering.

Old Merlier looked at the captain in surprise, as if to ask if it were over.

—— "Here it comes," the latter muttered. "Look out! Don't stay there."

He had not finished speaking when there came a terrific volley. It was as if the great elm were mowed down, a cloud of leaves whirled about them. Luckily the Prussians had fired too high. Dominique dragged, almost carried Françoise away, while old Merlier followed them, crying out, —

—— "Go down to the little cellar; the walls are solid."

But they did not mind him, they went into the great hall, where ten soldiers, or so, were waiting in silence, with shutters closed, peeking through the cracks. The captain had stayed alone in the courtyard, crouched down behind the little wall, while the furious volleys continued. The soldiers he had stationed outside yielded ground only foot by foot. Yet they came in, one by one, crawling on their faces, when the enemy had dislodged them from their hiding places. Their orders were to gain time, not to show themselves, so that the Prussians might not know what numbers they had before them. Another hour went by; and, as a sergeant came up, saying that there were only two or three men left outside, the officer looked at his watch, muttering, —

—— "Half after two. . . . Come, we must hold out four hours."

He had the gate of the courtyard shut, and all preparations were made for an energetic resistance. As the Prussians were on the other side of the Morelle, an immediate assault was not to be feared. To be sure, there was a bridge, a little over a mile off, but they doubtless did not know of its

existence, and it was hardly probable that they would try to ford the river. So the officer merely had the road watched. The whole effort was to be made on the side toward the fields.

The firing had once more ceased. The mill seemed dead beneath the hot sun. Not a shutter was opened, not a sound came from the inside. Little by little, meanwhile, the Prussians showed themselves at the outskirts of the Gagny wood. They stretched forth their heads, grew more daring. In the mill, several soldiers had already levelled their rifles; but the captain cried out, —

——"No, no, wait. . . . Let them come up."

They were very cautious about it, looking at the mill with evident distrust. This old dwelling, silent and dismal, with its curtains of ivy, made them uneasy. Still, they kept advancing. When there were about fifty of them in the meadow opposite, the officer said a single word, —

——"Fire!"

A tearing sound was heard, followed by single shots. Françoise, shaken with a fit of trembling, put her hands up to her ears, in spite of herself. Dominique, behind the

soldiers, looked on; and, when the smoke had blown away a little, he saw three Prussians stretched on their backs in the middle of the field. The rest had thrown themselves down behind the willows and poplars; and the siege began.

For over an hour the mill was riddled with bullets. They whipped its old walls like hail. When they struck stone, you heard them flatten out and fall back into the water. Into wood they penetrated with a hollow sound. Now and then, a cracking told that the wheel had been hit. The soldiers inside husbanded their shots, fired only when they could take aim. From time to time, the captain would look at his watch; and, as a ball split a shutter and then lodged in the ceiling, —

—— "Four o'clock," he muttered. "We shall never hold out."

It was true, this terrible firing of musketry was shivering the old mill. A shutter fell into the water, riddled like a piece of lace, and had to be replaced by a mattress. Old Merlier exposed himself every moment, to make sure of the injury done to his poor wheel, whose cracking went to his heart. It was all over with it, this time; never would he be able to repair it.

Dominique had implored Françoise to go, but she would stay with him; she had sat down behind a great oak clothespress, the sides of which gave out a deep sound. Then Dominique placed himself in front of Françoise. He had not fired yet, he held his gun in his hands, not being able to get up to the windows, whose entire width was taken up by the soldiers. At every discharge the floor shook.

——"Look out! look out!" the captain cried of a sudden.

He had just seen a whole black mass come out from the wood. Immediately a formidable platoon fire was opened. It was as if a waterspout had passed over the mill. Another shutter gave way, and, by the gaping opening of the window, the bullets came in. Two soldiers rolled upon the floor. One did not move; they pushed him up against the wall, because he was in the way. The other squirmed on the ground, begging them to make an end of him; but no one minded him, the balls kept coming in, every one shielded himself, and tried to find a loophole to fire back through. A third soldier was wounded; he said not a word, he let himself slide down by the edge of a table, with fixed and haggard

eyes. Opposite these dead men, Françoise, seized with horror, had pushed her chair aside mechanically, to sit down on the ground next the wall; she felt smaller there, and in less danger. Meanwhile they had gone after all the mattresses in the house, and had half stopped up the window. The hall was getting filled with rubbish, with broken weapons, with gutted furniture.

—— "Five o'clock," said the captain. "Keep it up. . . . They are going to try to cross the water."

At this instant, Françoise gave a shriek. A rebounding ball had just grazed her forehead. A few drops of blood appeared. Dominique looked at her; then, stepping up to the window, he fired his first shot, and kept on firing. He loaded, fired, without paying any attention to what was going on near him; only from time to time, he would give Françoise a look. For the rest, he did not hurry himself, took careful aim. The Prussians, creeping along by the poplars, were attempting the passage of the Morelle, as the captain had foreseen; but, as soon as one of them risked showing himself, he would fall, hit in the head by a ball from Dominique. The captain, who followed this game, was astonished. He

complimented the young man, saying that he would be glad to have a lot of marksmen like him. Dominique did not hear him. A ball cut his shoulder, another bruised his arm; and he kept on firing.

There were two more men killed. The mattresses, all slashed to bits, no longer stopped up the windows. A last volley seemed as if it would carry away the mill. The position was no longer tenable. Still the officer repeated, —

—— "Stick to it. . . . Half an hour more."

Now he counted the minutes. He had promised his superior officers to hold the enemy there until evening, and would not draw back a sole's breadth before the time he had set for the retreat. He still had his gracious manner, smiling at Françoise, to reassure her. He himself had just picked up a dead soldier's rifle, and was firing.

There were only four soldiers left in the hall. The Prussians showed themselves in a body on the other bank of the Morelle, and it was evident that they might cross the river at any time. A few minutes more elapsed. The captain stuck to it obstinately, would not give the order to retreat, when a sergeant came running up, saying, —

—— "They are on the road, they are going to take us in the rear."

The Prussians must have found the bridge. The captain pulled out his watch.

—— "Five minutes more," said he. "They won't be here for five minutes."

Then, at the stroke of six, he at last consented to order his men out by a little door, opening upon an alleyway. From there they threw themselves into a ditch, they reached the Sauval forest. Before going, the captain saluted old Merlier very politely, excusing himself. And he even added, —

—— "Make them lose time. . . . We shall be back again."

Meanwhile, Dominique stayed on in the hall. He still kept firing, hearing nothing, understanding nothing. He only felt that he must defend Françoise. The soldiers were gone, without his suspecting it the least in the world. He took aim, and killed his man at every shot. Suddenly there was a loud noise. The Prussians, from the rear, had just overrun the courtyard. He fired his last shot, and they fell upon him, as his piece was still smoking.

Four men held him. Others shouted round him in a frightful language. They all but cut his throat off-hand. Françoise threw herself

before him in supplication; but an officer came in and took charge of the prisoner. After a few sentences exchanged in German with the soldiers, he turned to Dominque and said roughly, and in very good French, —

——"You will be shot in two hours."

III

It was a rule made by the German staff: every Frenchman not belonging to the regular army, and taken with arms in his hands, should be shot. Even the guerilla companies were not recognized as belligerents. By thus making terrible examples of the peasants who defended their own firesides, the Germans wished to prevent the uprising of the whole country en masse, which they dreaded.

The officer, a tall, lean man of about fifty, put Dominique through a brief examination. Although he spoke very pure French, he had quite the Prussian stiffness.

——"You belong in these parts?

——"No, I am a Belgian."

——"Why have you taken up arms? . . . All this can't be any of your business."

Dominique did not answer. At this moment, the officer caught sight of Françoise, standing upright and very pale, listening; her slight wound put a red bar across her white forehead.

He looked at the young people, one after the other, seemed to understand, and contented himself with adding, —

—— "You don't deny that you were firing?"

—— "I fired as long as I was able," Dominique answered quietly.

This confession was needless, for he was black with powder, covered with sweat, spotted with some drops of blood that had run down from the scratch on his shoulder.

—— "Very well," the officer repeated. "You will be shot in two hours."

Françoise did not cry out. She clasped her hands together and raised them in a gesture of mute despair. The officer noticed this gesture. Two soldiers had led Dominique away into the next room, where they were to keep him in sight. The young girl had dropped down upon a chair, her legs giving way under her; she could not cry, she was choking. Meanwhile the officer kept looking at her closely. At last, he spoke to her.

—— "That young man is your brother?" he asked.

She shook her head. He stood there stiff, without a smile. Then, after a silence, —

—— "He has lived a long while in these parts?"

She nodded yes, still dumb.

——"Then he must know the woods round here very well?"

This time, she spoke.

——"Yes, sir," she said, looking at him in some surprise.

He said no more, and turned on his heel, asking to have the mayor of the village brought to him. But Françoise had risen, a faint blush on her face, thinking to have caught the drift of his questions, and seeing fresh hope in them. It was she who ran to find her father.

Old Merlier, as soon as the shots had ceased, had run quickly down the wooden steps to look at his wheel. He adored his daughter, he had a stout friendship for Dominique, his intended son-in-law; but his wheel also held a large place in his heart. As the two young ones, as he called them, had come safe and sound out of the scrimmage, he thought of his other love, and this one had suffered grievously. And, bending over the huge wooden carcass, he investigated its wounds, the picture of distress. Five paddles were in splinters, the central framework was riddled. He stuck his fingers into the bullet holes, to measure their depth; he thought over how he could repair all this damage. Françoise found him already stopping up cracks with broken bits of wood and moss.

—— "Father," she said, "you are wanted."

And at last she wept, telling him what she had just heard. Old Merlier shook his head. You didn't shoot people that way. He must see. And he went back into the mill, with his silent, pacific air. When the officer asked him for victuals for his men, he answered that the people in Rocreuse were not accustomed to being bullied, and that nothing would be got from them by violence. He took everything upon himself, but on the condition of being allowed to act alone. The officer showed signs, at first, of getting angry at this cool manner; then he gave in to the old man's curt and businesslike way of talking. He even called him back, to ask him, —

—— "What do you call those woods there, opposite?"

—— "The Sauval woods."

—— "And what is their extent?"

The miller looked at him fixedly.

—— "I don't know," he answered.

And he walked away. An hour later, the contributions of victuals and money required by the officer were in the courtyard of the mill. Night was approaching; Françoise followed the soldiers' movements anxiously. She did not go far from the room in which Dominique was shut

up. At about seven, she had a poignant emotion; she saw the officer go into the prisoner's room, and, for a quarter of an hour, she heard their voices raised. One instant, the officer reappeared on the threshold, to give an order in German, which she did not understand; but, when twelve men came and fell into line in the courtyard, with their muskets, she fell a-trembling, she felt ready to die. So it was all over; the execution was to take place. The twelve men waited there ten minutes. Dominique's voice was still raised in a tone of violent refusal. At last, the officer came out, slamming the door and saying, —

—— "Very well, think it over. . . . I give you till to-morrow morning."

And, with a motion of his arm, he ordered the twelve men to break ranks. Françoise stayed on in a sort of stupor. Old Merlier, who had not stopped smoking his pipe, while looking at the squad with an air of simple curiosity, came up and took her by the arm with fatherly gentleness. He led her to her room.

—— "Keep quiet," he said, "try to sleep. . . . To-morrow it will be daylight, and we will see."

When he withdrew, he locked her in, for prudence sake. It was a principle of his that

women were no good, and that they made a mess of it whenever they undertook anything serious. But Françoise did not go to bed; she stayed a long time sitting on her bed, listening to the noises in the house. The German soldiers, encamped in the courtyard, were singing and laughing: they must have been eating and drinking up to eleven, for the noise did not stop for an instant. In the mill itself, heavy steps sounded every now and then; no doubt, they were relieving sentries. But what interested her, above all, were noises that she could not make out, in the room under hers. Several times she lay down on the ground, she put her ear to the floor. This room happened to be the one in which Dominique was locked up. He must have been walking from the wall to the window, for she long heard the regular cadence of his steps; then there was a dead silence, he had doubtless sat down. Besides, the noises stopped, everything was hushed in sleep. When the house seemed to her to slumber, she opened the window as softly as possible, and rested her elbows on the sill.

Outside, the night was calm and warm. The slender crescent moon, setting behind the Sauval woods, lighted up the country with the glimmer of a night-taper. The elongated sha-

dows of the great trees barred the meadows with black, while the grass, in the unshaded spots, put on the softness of greenish velvet. But Françoise did not stop to note the mysterious charm of the night. She examined the country, looking for the sentinels that the Germans must have stationed on one side. She plainly saw their shadows, ranged like the rungs of a ladder along the Morelle. Only a single one stood opposite the mill, on the other side of the river, near a willow whose branches dipped into the water. Françoise saw him distinctly; he was a big fellow, standing motionless, his face turned toward the sky with the dreamy look of a shepherd.

Then, when she had carefully inspected the ground, she went back and sat down upon her bed. She stayed there an hour, deeply absorbed. Then she listened again; in the house, not a breath stirred. She went back to the window, and looked out; but, no doubt, she saw danger in one of the horns of the moon, which still appeared behind the trees, for she went back again to wait. At last, the time seemed to have come. The night was quite dark, she no longer saw the sentinel opposite, the country lay spread out like a pool of ink. She listened intently for a moment, and made

up her mind. An iron ladder ran near the window, some bars let into the wall, leading from the wheel up to the loft, down which the millers used to climb, to get at certain cog-wheels; then, when the machinery had been altered, the ladder had long since disappeared beneath the rank growth of ivy that covered that side of the mill.

Françoise bravely climbed over the balustrade of her window, grasped one of the iron bars, and found herself in empty space. She began to climb down. Her skirts were much in her way. Suddenly, a stone broke loose from the masonry, and fell into the Morelle with a resounding splash. She stopped, chilled with a shudder. But she saw that the waterfall, with its continuous roar, drowned out from afar any noise she might make, and she climbed down more boldly, feeling for the ivy with her foot, making sure of the rungs of the ladder. When she had got on a level with the room that was used as Dominique's prison, she stopped. An unforeseen difficulty nearly made her lose all her courage; the window of the room below was not cut regularly, under the window of her chamber; it was some way from the ladder, and, when she stretched out her hand, she felt only the wall. Would she have

to climb up again, without carrying her plan through to the end? Her arms were getting tired, the murmur of the Morelle beneath her began to make her dizzy. Then she tore off little bits of mortar from the wall, and threw them against Dominique's window. He did not hear, perhaps he was asleep. She broke off some more pieces from the wall, barking her fingers. And her strength was giving out, she felt herself falling backwards, when Dominique, at last, softly opened his window.

——"It's I," she whispered. "Take me quick, I'm falling."

It was the first time she had tutoyéed him. He caught her, leaning out, and lifted her into the room. There, she had a fit of tears, stifling her sobs, so as not to be heard. Then, by a supreme effort, she calmed herself.

——"You are guarded?" she asked in a low voice.

Dominique, still dumfounded at seeing her thus, made a simple sign, pointing to his door. They heard a snoring on the other side; the sentinel must have given way to drowsiness, and lain down on the ground, across the doorway, thinking that, in this way, the prisoner could not get out.

——"You must run away," she went on

rapidly. "I have come to implore you to run away, and to say good by."

But he did not seem to hear her. He kept repeating, —

—— "How, it's you, it's you! . . ! how you frightened me! You might have killed yourself."

He took her hands, he kissed them.

—— "How I love you Françoise! . . . You are as brave as you are good. I only had one fear, that of dying without seeing you once more. . . . But you are here, and now they can shoot me. When I have had a quarter of an hour with you, I shall be ready."

Little by little, he had drawn her closer to him, and she rested her head upon his shoulder. The danger drew them nearer together. They forgot all in this embrace.

—— "Ah! Françoise," Dominique went on in a caressing voice, "to-day is Saint-Louis's day, our wedding day, that we have waited for so long. Nothing has been able to separate us, since we are here, all alone, faithful to our tryst. . . . It's our wedding morning now, isn't it?"

—— "Yes, yes," she repeated, "our wedding morning."

They exchanged a kiss, trembling. But of a

sudden, she broke loose, the terrible reality rose up before her.

—— "You must run away, you must run away," she stammered out. "Let us not lose a minute."

And, as he stretched out his arms once more to take her in the darkness, she again tutoyéed him, —

—— "Oh! I beg you, listen to me. . . . If you die, I shall die. In an hour it will be daylight. I wish you to go at once."

Then, rapidly, she explained her plan. The iron ladder ran down to the wheel; there, he could take the paddles and get into the boat, which was in a recess. After that, it would be easy for him to reach the other bank of the river and escape.

—— "But there must be sentinels there?" he said.

—— "Only one, opposite, at the foot of the first willow."

—— "And if he sees me, if he tries calling out?"

Françoise shuddered. She put a knife she had brought down with her into his hand. There was a silence.

—— "And your father, and you?" Dominique continued. "But no, I can't run away. . . .

When I am gone, maybe these soldiers will slaughter you. . . . You don't know them. They proposed to show me mercy, if I would be their guide through the Sauval forest. When they find me gone, they will stick at nothing."

The young girl did not stop to discuss. She simply answered all the reasons he gave with, —

—— "For the love of me, fly. . . . If you love me, Dominique, don't stay here a minute longer."

Then she promised to climb back to her room. They would not know that she had helped him. She at last took him in her arms, kissed him to convince him, in an extraordinary outburst of passion. He was beaten. He asked not a question further.

—— "Swear to me that your father knows of what you are doing, and that he advises me to run away?"

—— "It was my father sent me," Françoise answered boldly.

She lied. At this moment, she felt nothing but a boundless need of knowing him in safety, of escaping from this abominable thought that the sun would give the signal for his death. When he was gone, all mishaps might rush down upon her; it would seem sweet to her, as long as he was alive. The selfishness of her love wished him alive, before all else.

—— "Very well," said Dominique, "I will do as you please."

Then they said nothing more. Dominique went to open the window again; but, suddenly, a noise chilled their blood. The door was shaken, and they thought it was being opened. Evidently, a patrol had heard their voices; and both of them, standing pressed against each other, waited in unspeakable anguish. The door was shaken again, but it did not open. Each gave a stifled sigh; they saw how it was, it must have been the soldier lying across the threshold turning over. And really, silence was restored, the snoring began again.

Dominique would have it that Françoise must first climb back to her room. He took her in his arms; he bade her a mute farewell. Then he helped her to seize the ladder, and grappled hold of it in his turn. But he refused to go down a single rung before he knew she was in her room. When Françoise had climbed in, she whispered, in a voice light as a breath,—

—— "Au revoir; I love you!"

She stopped with her elbows resting on the window sill, and tried to follow Dominique with her eyes. The night was still very dark. She looked for the sentinel, and did not see him; only the willow made a pale spot in the midst

of the darkness. For an instant, she heard the rustling of Dominique's body along the ivy. Then the wheel creaked, and there was a gentle plashing that told that the young man had found the boat. A minute later, in fact, she made out the dark outline of the boat on the gray sheet of the Morelle. Then anguish stopped her breath. At every moment, she thought to hear the sentinel's cry of alarm. The faintest sounds, scattered through the darkness, seemed to be the hurried tread of soldiers, the clatter of arms, the click of the hammers on the rifles. Yet seconds elapsed, the country slept on in sovereign peace. Dominique must have been landing on the other bank. Françoise saw nothing more. The stillness was majestic. And she heard a noise of scuffling feet, a hoarse cry, the dull thud of a falling body. Then the silence grew deeper; and, as if she had felt death passing by, she waited on, all cold, face to face with the pitch-dark night.

IV

At daybreak, shouting voices shook the mill. Old Merlier had come to open Françoise's door. She came down into the courtyard, pale and very calm. But there she gave a shudder, before the dead body of a Prussian soldier, which was stretched out near the well, on a cloak spread on the ground.

Around the body, soldiers were gesticulating, crying aloud in fury. Many of them shook their fists at the village. Meanwhile, the officer had had old Merlier called, as mayor of the township.

—— "See here," said he, in a voice choking with rage, "here's one of our men who has been found murdered by the river-side. . . . We must make a tremendous example, and I trust you will help us to find out the murderer."

—— "Anything you please," answered the miller in his phlegmatic way. "Only it will not be easy."

The officer had stooped down to throw aside a flap of the cloak that hid the dead man's face.

Then a horrible wound appeared. The sentinel had been struck in the throat, and the weapon was left in the wound. It was a kitchen knife with a black handle.

—— "Look at this knife," said the officer to old Merlier, "perhaps it may help us in our search."

The old man gave a start. But he recovered himself immediately, and answered, without moving a muscle of his face, —

—— "Everybody in these parts has knives like that. . . . Maybe your man was tired of fighting, and did the job himself. Such things have been known to happen."

—— "Shut up!" the officer cried furiously. "I don't know what keeps me from setting fire to the four corners of the village."

His anger luckily prevented his noticing the profound change that had come over Françoise's face. She had to sit down on the stone bench, near the well. In spite of herself, her eyes never left that dead body, stretched on the ground almost at her feet. He was a big, handsome fellow, who looked like Dominique, with light hair and blue eyes. This resemblance made her heartsick. She thought of how the dead man had perhaps left some sweetheart behind, who would weep for him over there, in

Germany. And she recognized her knife in the dead man's throat. She had killed him.

Meanwhile, the officer talked of taking terrible measures against Rocreuse, when some soldiers came up running. They had only just noticed Dominique's escape. It occasioned an extreme agitation. The officer visited the premises, looked out of the window, which had been left open, understood it all, and came back exasperated.

Old Merlier seemed very much put out at Dominique's flight.

—— "The idiot!" he muttered, "he spoils it all."

Françoise, who heard him, was seized with anguish. For the rest, her father did not suspect her complicity. He shook his head, saying to her in an undertone, —

—— "Now we are in a fine scrape!"

—— "It's that rascal! It's that rascal!" cried the officer. "He must have reached the woods. . . . But he must be found for us, or the village shall pay for it."

And, addressing the miller, —

—— "Come, you must know where he is hiding?"

Old Merlier gave a noiseless chuckle, pointing to the wide extent of wooded hillside.

——"How do you expect to find a man in there?" said he.

——"Oh! there must be holes in there that you know of. I will give you ten men. You shall be their guide."

——"All right. Only it will take us a week to beat all the woods in the neighborhood."

The old man's coolness infuriated the officer. In fact, he saw the ridiculousness of this battue. It was then that he caught sight of Françoise, pale and trembling on the bench. The young girl's anxious attitude struck him. He said nothing for an instant, looking hard at the miller and Françoise by turns.

——"Isn't this man," he at last brutally asked the old man, "your daughter's lover?"

Old Merlier turned livid, and one would have thought him on the point of throwing himself upon the officer and strangling him. He drew himself up stiffly; he did not answer. Françoise put her face between her hands.

——"Yes, that's it," the Prussian went on, "you or your daughter have helped him to run away. You are his accomplice. . . . For the last time, will you give him up to us?"

The miller did not answer. He had turned away, looking off into the distance, as if the officer had not been speaking to him. This put the last touch to the latter's anger.

—— "Very well," he said, "you shall be shot instead."

And he once more ordered out the firing party. Old Merlier still kept cool. He hardly gave a slight shrug of his shoulders; this whole drama seemed to him in rather bad taste. No doubt, he did not believe that a man was to be shot with so little ado. Then, when the squad had come, he said gravely, —

—— "You're in earnest, then? . . . All right. If you absolutely must have some one, I will do as well as another."

But Françoise sprang up, half crazed, stammering out, —

—— "Mercy, monsieur, don't do any harm to my father. Kill me instead. . . . It's I who helped Dominique to escape. I am the only culprit."

—— "Be quiet, little girl," cried old Merlier. "What are you lying for? . . . She spent the night locked up in her room, monsieur. She lies, I assure you."

—— "No, I am not lying," the young girl replied ardently. "I climbed down out of the window, I urged Dominique to fly. . . . It's the truth, the only truth. . . ."

The old man turned very pale. He saw clearly in her eyes that she was not lying, and

this story appalled him. Ah! these children, with their hearts, how they spoiled everything! Then he grew angry.

——"She's crazy, don't believe her. She is telling you stupid stories. . . . Come, let's have done with it."

She tried to protest again. She knelt down, she clasped her hands. The officer looked quietly on at this heartrending struggle.

——"Good God!" he said at last, "I take your father, because I haven't got the other one. . . . Try and find the other one, and your father shall go free."

For a moment she looked at him, her eyes staring wide at the atrocity of this proposal.

——"It's horrible," she murmured. "Where do you expect me to find Dominique at this time? He's gone; I don't know where he is."

——"Well, choose. Him or your father."

——"Oh! my God! how can I choose? But even if I knew where Dominique was, I could not choose! . . . It is my heart you are breaking. . . . I had rather die at once. Yes, it would be soonest over so. Kill me, I beg of you, kill me. . . ."

The officer at last grew impatient at this scene of despair and tears. He cried out,—

——"I've had enough of this! I'm willing

to be good-natured, I consent to give you two hours. . . . If your sweetheart isn't here in two hours, your father shall pay for him."

And he had old Merlier taken to the room which had been used for Dominique's prison. The old man asked for some tobacco, and fell to smoking. No emotion was to be detected in his impassive face. Only, when he was alone, two big tears ran slowly down his cheeks. His poor, dear child; how she suffered!

Françoise had stayed in the middle of the courtyard. Some Prussian soldiers passed by, laughing. Some of them called out to her, jokes which she did not understand. She stared at the door through which her father had just disappeared. And, with a slow movement, she raised her hand to her forehead, as if to keep it from bursting.

The officer turned on his heel, repeating, —

—— "You have two hours. Try to make good use of them."

She had two hours. This sentence kept buzzing in her head. Then, mechanically, she went out of the courtyard, she walked straight before her. Whither should she go? What should she do? She did not even try to decide, because she felt convinced of the uselessness of her efforts. Yet she would have liked to find

Dominique. They would have come to an understanding together, they might perhaps have hit upon an expedient. And, amid the confusion of her thoughts, she went down to the bank of the Morelle, which she crossed below the dam, at a place where there were some large stones. Her feet led her under the first willow, at the corner of the field. As she bent down, she saw a pool of blood that made her turn pale. That was clearly the place. And she followed Dominique's tracks in the trodden grass; he must have run, a line of long strides was to be seen cutting through the field cornerwise. Then, farther on, she lost the tracks; but, in a neighboring field, she thought she found them again. This brought her to the outskirts of the forest, where all traces were wiped out.

Françoise plunged in under the trees, notwithstanding. It was a relief to be alone. She sat down for a moment; then, remembering that her time was running out, she got up again. How long was it since she had left the mill? Five minutes? half an hour? She had lost all consciousness of time. Perhaps Dominique had gone and hidden in a copse she knew of, where, one afternoon, they had eaten filberts together. She went to the copse and searched it. Only a blackbird flew out, whis-

tling its soft, melancholy tune. Then she thought he had taken refuge in a hollow in the rocks, where he sometimes used to lie in ambush for game; but the hollow in the rocks was empty. What was the use of looking for him? she would not find him; and, little by little, her desire to find him grew furious, she walked on faster. The notion that he might have climbed up a tree suddenly struck her. From that moment, she pushed on with upturned eyes, and, that he might know she was near, she called out to him every fifteen or twenty steps. The cuckoos answered her, a breath of air passing through the branches made her think he was there, and was coming down. Once she even thought she saw him; she stopped, choking, having a good mind to run away. What would she say to him? Had she come, then, to lead him away and have him shot? Oh! no, she would not mention these things. She would cry out to him to escape, not to stay in the neighborhood. Then the thought of her father waiting for her gave her a sharp pang. She fell upon the turf, weeping, repeating aloud, —

—— "My God! my God! why am I here!"

She was crazy to have come. And, as if seized with fright, she ran, she tried to find a way out of the forest. Three times she took

the wrong path, and she thought she should not find the mill again, when she came out into a field, just opposite Rocreuse. As soon as she caught sight of the village, she stopped. Was she going to return alone?

As she stood there, a voice called to her softly, —

—— "Françoise! Françoise!"

And she saw Dominique raising his head above the edge of a ditch. Just God! she had found him! So heaven wished his death? She held back a cry, she let herself slide down into the ditch.

—— "You were looking for me?" he asked.

—— "Yes," she answered, her head buzzing, not knowing what she said.

—— "Ah! what's going on?"

She looked down, she stammered out, —

—— "Why, nothing; I was anxious, I wanted to see you."

Then, reassured, he told her that he had not wished to go far. He feared for them. Those rascals of Prussians were just the sort to wreak vengeance upon women and old men. Then, all was going well; and he added, laughing, —

—— "Our wedding will be for this day week, that's all."

Then, as she was still overcome, he grew serious again.

—— "But what's the matter with you? You are keeping something from me."

—— "No, I swear to you. I ran to come . . ."

He kissed her, saying that it was imprudent for either of them to talk any longer; and he wished to get back to the forest. She held him back. She was trembling.

—— "Listen, perhaps it would be as well for you to stay here, all the same. . . . Nobody is looking for you, you're not afraid of anything."

—— "Françoise, you are keeping something from me," he repeated.

Again she swore she was keeping nothing from him. Only she had rather know that he was near; and she stammered out other reasons besides. She struck him as acting so queerly, that now he himself would not have been willing to leave her. Besides, he believed the French would return. Troops had been seen over Sauval way.

—— "Ah! let them be in a hurry, let them be here as soon as possible!" he muttered fervently.

At this moment the Rocreuse church clock struck eleven. The strokes came clear and distinct. She sprang up in fright; it was two hours since she had left the mill.

——"Listen," she said rapidly, "if we should

need you, I will go up to my room and wave my handkerchief."

And she left him, running, while Dominique, very anxious, stretched himself out on the edge of the ditch, to keep his eye on the mill. As she was just turning into Rocreuse, Françoise met an old beggar, old Bontemps, who knew the whole country. He bowed to her, he had just seen the miller in the midst of the Prussians; then, crossing himself and mumbling some disconnected words, he went on his way.

——"The two hours are over," said the officer, when Françoise appeared.

Old Merlier was there, sitting on the bench by the well. He was still smoking. The young girl once more implored, wept, fell upon her knees. She wished to gain time. The hope of seeing the French return had grown in her, and, while bewailing her fate, she thought she heard the measured tread of an army. Oh! if they had come, if they had delivered them all!

——"Listen, monsieur, one hour, one hour more.... You can surely grant me one hour!"

But the officer was still inflexible. He even ordered two men to take her in charge and lead her away, that they might proceed quietly with the old man's execution. Then a frightful conflict went on in Françoise's heart. She could

not let her father be thus murdered. No, no, she would die with Dominique first; and she was bounding toward her room, when Dominique himself walked into the courtyard.

The officer and soldiers gave a shout of triumph. But he, as if no one but Françoise had been there, stepped up to her quietly, a little sternly.

——"That was wrong," said he. "Why didn't you bring me back with you? Old Bontemps had to tell me everything. . . . After all, here I am."

V

It was three o'clock. Great black clouds had slowly filled the sky, the tail of some not distant thunder-storm. This yellow sky, these copper-colored rags, changed the valley of Rocreuse, so cheerful in the sunshine, to a cut-throat den, full of suspicious shadows. The Prussian officer had been content to have Dominique locked up, without saying anything about what fate he had in store for him. Ever since noon, Françoise had been a prey to abominable anguish. She would not leave the courtyard, in spite of her father's urging. She was waiting for the French. But the hours passed by, night was at hand, and she suffered the more keenly that all this time gained did not seem likely to change the frightful catastrophe.

Nevertheless, at about three, the Prussians made preparations to go. A minute before, the officer had closeted himself with Dominique, as on the preceding day. Françoise saw that the young man's life was being decided on. Then she clasped her hands and prayed. Old Mer-

lier, beside her, maintained his mute and rigid attitude of an old peasant who does not struggle with the fatality of facts.

—— "Oh! my God! oh! my God!" stammered Françoise, "they are going to kill him."

The miller drew her close to him and took her upon his knees, like a child.

Just then the officer came out, while, behind him, two men led Dominique.

—— "Never, never!" cried the latter. "I am ready to die."

—— "Think of it well," replied the officer. "This service that you refuse us will be done for us by another. I offer you your life, I am generous. . . . It is only to be our guide to Montredon, through the woods. There must be paths."

Dominique made no answer.

—— "Then you are still obstinate?"

—— "Kill me, and let us have done with it," he answered.

Françoise, with hands clasped, implored him from across the yard. She had forgotten all, she would have urged him to some piece of cowardice. But old Merlier grasped her hands, that the Prussians might not see her delirious gesture.

—— "He is right," he murmured, "it's better to die."

The firing party was there. The officer was waiting for a moment of weakness on Dominique's part. He still counted on winning him over. There was a dead silence. From the distance were heard violent claps of thunder. A sultry heat weighed upon the country; and, in the midst of this silence, a shriek burst forth, —

—— "The French! the French!"

It was really they. On the Sauval road, on the outskirts of the wood, you could make out the line of red trousers. Inside the mill there was an extraordinary hubbub. The Prussian soldiers ran about with guttural exclamations. For the rest, not a shot had been fired yet.

—— "The French! the French!" screamed Françoise, clapping her hands.

She was like mad. She had broken loose from her father's embrace, and she laughed, her arms waving in the air. At last they were coming, and they had come in time, since Dominique was still there, erect!

A terrible firing that burst upon her ears like a thunder-stroke made her turn round. The officer had just muttered, —

—— "First of all, let us finish this job."

And, pushing Dominique up against the wall of a shed with his own hands, he had ordered,

"Fire!" When Françoise turned round, Dominique was lying on the ground, his breast pierced with twelve bullets.

She did not weep; she stood there in a stupor. Her eyes were fixed, and she went and sat down under the shed, a few steps from the body. She looked at it, at moments, she made a vague and childlike movement with her hand. The Prussians had laid hold of old Merlier as a hostage.

It was a fine fight. Rapidly, the officer stationed his men, recognizing that he could not beat a retreat without being overpowered. It was as well to sell his life dearly. Now it was the Prussians who defended the mill, and the French that made the attack. The firing began with unheard-of violence. For half an hour it did not stop. Then a dull explosion was heard, and a shot broke off one of the main branches of the hundred-year-old elm. The French had cannon. A battery, drawn up just above the ditch in which Dominique had hidden, swept the main street of Rocreuse. From this moment, the struggle could not last long.

Ah! the poor mill! Shot pierced it through and through. Half the roofing was carried away. Two walls crumbled. But it was,

above all, on the side toward the Morelle that the ruin done was piteous. The ivy, torn from the shattered walls, hung in rags; the river swept away débris of every sort, and, through a breach, you could see Françoise's room, with her bed, the white curtains of which were carefully drawn. Shot upon shot, the old wheel received two cannon-balls, and gave one last groan: the paddles were washed away by the current, the carcass collapsed. The mill had breathed out its soul.

Then the French stormed the place. There was a furious fight with side-arms. Beneath the rust-colored sky, the cutthroat hollow of the valley was filled with killed. The broad meadows looked grim, with their great single trees, their rows of poplars streaking them with shadows. To the right and left, the forests were like the walls of a circus, shutting in the combatants; while the springs, the fountains, the running waters, gave forth sounds of sobbing, amid the panic of the country-side.

Under the shed, Françoise had not stirred, crouched down opposite Dominique's body. Old Merlier was killed outright by a spent bullet. Then, when the Prussians had been annihilated, and the mill was burning, the

French captain was the first man to enter the courtyard. From the beginning of the campaign, it was the only success he had won. And, all aglow, drawing up his tall figure to its full height, he laughed with his gracious air of a fine cavalier. And, seeing Françoise, imbecile, between the dead bodies of her husband and father, amidst the smoking ruins of the mill, he gallantly saluted her with his sword, crying out, —

—— "Victory! victory!"

TABLE OF CONTENTS



